



The Rutherford Fyalls

An interview with Dr Bob Fyall

by Ann Allen

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An exciting new chapter opens this year for Rutherford House as the next Director takes up his appointment. Rev Dr Nigel Cameron was succeeded by Rev David Searle who continues his excellent work part-time until September when Rev Dr Robert Fyall takes up the reins.

It is a source of real encouragement to see a reversal of the 'brain drain' and welcome Bob back from his fruitful exile in the north of England. He delighted those gathered in conference at Crieff last January with his profound and challenging addresses on 'Preaching the Law' (see following article for an example of one address). So it is with a sense of heightened anticipation that we await his arrival and I was delighted to have this opportunity to allow him to introduce himself more fully to the Rutherford House stakeholders.

Ann: Bob, you hail from the East Neuk of Fife originally. Tell us a bit about your spiritual beginnings there.

Bob: I had strict but loving parents who were members of the Brethren and that shaped my early life. Later I

reacted strongly against this, but, in spite of much that was narrow and (I believe) mistaken, I have carried from these days two valuable insights. The first is that there is no such thing as a 'no go' area in the Bible; all of it is to be read and preached. The other is the experience of a community which cared for each other; you had to be 'one of them', but there was genuine warmth. In such an environment it was virtually impossible to have the kind of conversion experience insisted on as the only way to become a Christian. As I grew older I became increasingly aware of the need for personal commitment and discipleship.

Ann: Ministry followed on from a different kind of communication. You began as an English Teacher and I think that thread in your past is reflected in much of your approach to biblical literature, isn't it?

Bob: My love of English Literature was opening a world which challenged and questioned much of my

upbringing. At that time I began my fascination with the poetry of the Bible and my first encounter with the book of Job. I did a degree in English at St. Andrew's University and taught English first in Dundee, then in Crieff and Musselburgh where I was head of department. During that time the inevitable happened and I had five or six years away from Church. Curiously (or perhaps not) it was then that the crazy idea that I was being called to preach began to germinate.

Ann: I know other folk on the Scottish scene in your generation who continue to preach in Brethren circles today. Presumably the Brethren offered an initiation into preaching to congregations?

Bob: Not just in the Brethren. Briefly, when Thelma and I started going out I went with her to a charismatic church. Once again, as with the earlier Brethren experience, there are valuable insights I would want to acknowledge from those days. There too I was given opportunities to preach as I had done already in the Brethren. But the conviction began to grow that it was to be the Church of Scotland that God had in mind for the next stage. The conviction crystallised and I began the process. Thelma and I became members of Holyrood Abbey and benefited enormously from Jim Philip's ministry. Why did all this happen? When the Holy Spirit is after you, you don't get away. But there were two factors. One was the reading of *The Work of the Pastor* by William Still. I realised that this was it; no more flirting with the idea. The other was that my career was developing well; the prospect of moving onto the next stage was pretty certain – the time for decision had come. So it was that in the summer of 1982 I went to Selection Conference from a Monday to a Wednesday, got married on the Saturday, and started New College in October.

Ann: It's good to know we have a man of decisiveness and speedy

action in you, Bob! We found out more of your qualities when you, along with Thelma and Carmen, arrived in Chryston one summer as our probationer assistant. What did ministry in Scotland teach you?

Bob: There were invaluable lessons over the seven years. The experience in Chryston was brief but immensely profitable. There the situation was of a living church emerging from generations of traditionalism and a sense of moving forward and a commitment both to feeding the flock and to evangelism.

The experience in Bannockburn was tough and yet valuable in giving insights into how resistant traditional churchgoers can be to the Gospel. I think I learned the mystery of God's ways. Preaching, however well presented, does not invariably lead to transformed lives. We know that from such parables as the Sower but it is a painful thing to discover in reality. Certainly I hope it has given me an empathy with those in similar situations and a desire to help them. By the grace of God, a real impact was made on a handful of lives.

Ann: God was leading you out from there to a different area of ministry; from the parish to the lecture theatre and further study. You seem to have crammed an enormous amount into your weekly schedule in Durham.

Bob: Coming to Durham was the product of a chain of events which I did not initiate. Here I have been responsible for the teaching of Old Testament in Cranmer Hall, St. John's College, Durham which trains Anglicans and Methodists for the ministry. In my early years I was also director of studies and I completed my PhD at the end of my first year in Durham.

We became members of Claypath United Reformed Church. I did a fair amount of preaching there but also in my first two years I became a

recognised preacher for the Methodist circuit and preached most Sundays in one of the churches in the region. In 1992 the then-minister of Claypath left and I was asked to become Interim Minister during the vacancy. During that time I was asked to consider a joint appointment with the College and Church. That has been the case for the last decade.

Ann: What has that involved you in?

Bob: The main thrust of my work has been with students, both in college and in the church setting. What God has done in the Claypath congregation has been exciting and I am grateful for the privilege of having been part of it. In 1993 something like 30-50 students were coming. Within months the number had risen to something like more than 200 in the mornings and 100+ in the evenings. More recently evenings have become our main student service with 250+ attending. Numbers are not everything; more importantly many have come to faith, and many, many more are serving the Lord all over the world. Over the last six years I have had the help of a number of gifted and capable student workers largely financed through the generosity of St. Helens, Bishopsgate, in London. To counterbalance that the year round congregations remain very small (under 50) so the disparity in numbers in and out of term has been hard. But a real work has been done which only eternity will tell. All the praise and glory goes to God.

Ann: Alongside that double-edged ministry of lecturing and leading a congregation you were also studying, completing a PhD and writing. I marvel at how you managed to juggle all these competing claims upon your time! Your publication in Grove Booklets on *Preaching on Old Testament Narrative* was being recommended to us recently and that's only a small part of what you have published.

Bob: I increasingly see writing as an important part of my ministry, and I am glad that in appointing me the Trustees have recognised that too. I have had published by IVP a commentary on Job, *Now My Eyes See You*, also commentaries on Daniel and on *The Ministry of the Word* published by BRF. Currently I am working on Commentaries on 1 and 2 Kings and hope to embark on one on the Five Scrolls, Esther, Ruth, Lamentations, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. New projects which I would love to take up are a book on 'Preaching and the Literary Genre' and a commentary on Ezra and Haggai for the BST series. Basically I'm a teacher and preacher who has a heart to help others in these areas and all I produce in literature works towards that end. All of these and more should keep me occupied until retirement at least!

Ann: Publications of that nature and status will certainly help put the academic excellence of the House on the map. Now you are moving back to Scotland have you any reflections on how evangelicalism in England is faring today?

Bob: Of course England is a much larger country than Scotland and therefore has a much greater variety in Evangelicalism as in other things. The appointment of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury has polarised opinion. On the whole he has been welcomed by 'open' Evangelicals, but the large and powerful 'conservative' Evangelical churches have distanced themselves from him. Debates over the ordination of women and the gay issue have further divided the constituency.

Increasingly conservative evangelicals see the importance of training not just ministers but youth workers, student workers and others to be a missionary church for the 21st century. We have, I believe, much to learn from this in Scotland. I think also, English Evangelicals, such as David Holloway, have been more

ready to engage in national debate and to fight the wolf as well as feed the sheep. In my view it is vital for Scottish and English evangelicals to have closer links and share insights.

Ann: You are bringing a wealth and variety of experience to the job at Rutherford House. What drew you to this position in the first place?

Bob: Amongst other things. I think Rutherford House has three great strengths:

- The emphasis on training and teaching ministers, elders and others. I applaud David Searle's emphasis on that and the reputation now established.
- The commitment of the Trustees and the members of the various committees is impressive and a great source of strength.
- The dedication of the house staff and volunteers and the warmth of their welcome. Rutherford House is a happy and relaxing environment.

I want to build on and expand training opportunities with emphasis both on helping those already in ministry and encouraging a wider view of the ministry of all God's people. I want to see others with teaching gifts more fully involved in this work.

Ann: Are there particular areas that you would like to see develop as you take over the leadership?

Bob: Yes, I would hope in time to see a number of developments. I would want the House to:

- be at the heart of evangelical thinking, writing, preaching and resourcing church for mission, working with all who share vision.
- encourage ministers and others to engage in scholarly work through sabbaticals, etc.
- continue and expand the programme of conferences, etc.
- encourage evangelicals to participate in national debates and help to resource this.

- encourage and resource a new wave of effective preaching.

Ann: The church is facing difficulties across the board in recruitment, in evangelism, in failing membership. Against that sombre background what vision do you have for the usefulness and purpose of Rutherford House?

Bob: The words and images we use are important: if we think in terms of 'holding the fort' we are opting for managing decline. The vision of 'turning the tide' is a positive one. We cannot turn the tide, only the Holy Spirit can, but we need to cultivate expectancy.

I can think of four main areas where the House can provide effective ministry:

- Promote effective preaching by training and example. Training not only ministers and elders but youth workers, student workers and lay assistants. We have much to learn from projects such as Cornhill in English evangelicalism. This would both help to revitalise congregations and, incidentally, provide a new pool of recruits for full-time ministry.
- Academic excellence: we need to continue the House's good record of conferences, books, etc. and add a new emphasis on Biblical Theology. Continue to build up links with evangelical scholars and welcome their contribution to the Church. Continue my own programme of research and writing and encourage ministers and others to undertake further study and writing.
- Resourcing the church. Effective preaching is key to so much else but that must increasingly have an apologetics and evangelistic thrust. We must take seriously the 'death of Christian Britain' and resource churches to communicate with 21st century society.
- Develop links particularly in the use of media and participation in public debate. On the other hand we need to provide pastoral care to church leaders, students and workers. There needs to

be time spent with such people and help to resource their ministry. The links with England and bodies such as the Proclamation Trust and Tyndale House need to be fostered. I'd love to see more young people involved in the work of the house.

Ann: That is a pretty comprehensive programme for anyone to undertake and it all needs to be under-girded with prayer. You and the family face a huge upheaval this autumn as you uproot and transplant into Edinburgh. What would you like us to be aware of and what could we pray for you in this transition period?

Bob: There are probably two main areas:

- For Thelma, Carmen, Drummond and myself facing this major upheaval. Pray for a role for Thelma in Edinburgh and decisions about work, etc. For Carmen and Drummond that they will have a living faith and make wise decisions about the course of their lives. For a family home in Edinburgh.
- For the task ahead which is both exciting and daunting. I thank God for this new opportunity and ask for prayer that I'll have and take wise advice and that the Lord will use the House as a part of turning the tide. Pray that the right opportunities for effective work will arise.

Ann: Rutherford House has played an increasingly strategic role over these last years in many areas of church life in Scotland. We thank God for calling a man of Bob Fyall's intellect and stature to take forward the work of the House and pray for him and the family a smooth transition and a deep sense of the Lord's presence and preparation as they go forward together to take up an exciting if somewhat daunting task. The Rutherford House Fyall file is opened and under God there will be much to record in it over the coming years of great blessing upon Bob's ministry here among us.

Preaching on

Bob Fyall

Hebrews 9 tells us about the regulations of the old covenant, the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and then in verses 7-9, there comes an astonishing statement.

When everything had been arranged like this (arrangements for the tabernacle) the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the High Priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time.

That statement is saying two things. First, obviously the old Levitical regulations have been abolished. Second, and more importantly, although the old regulations have gone, the Old Testament writings containing these regulations are even

more relevant for us than for the first readers. The Torah (the law in general) was written not primarily for old Israel, it was written for you and me. That is why we dare not ignore a book like Leviticus, because it is an illustration for the present time.

Leviticus is the great unpreached book. Why is this book so seldom taken for a series of sermons if it is an illustration for the present time? The reasons are obvious. The book seems dull and remote. It has often been the graveyard of pious hopes to read the Bible from cover to cover. And it tends to lack narrative interest, rather like the telephone directory – a great cast of characters but not much of a story! And, like the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles, it is a book that we shy away from. Probably preachers are afraid that in tackling it, they will indulge in barren intellectualism, the worst type of proposition-driven preaching, without illustration, without doors or windows and – like Melchizedek – without beginning or end.

I want first to suggest how to tackle studying Leviticus, then how we might plan a preaching series on Leviticus and, finally, I want to highlight chapter

Leviticus

Director-Designate of Rutherford House

16 (the day of Atonement), the passage referred to in our Hebrews quotation.

Studying Leviticus **Where Leviticus belongs**

First, we must place it in its widest context. It's fascinating as we read the Pentateuch that often we discover periods of time are passed over in relatively few chapters, and then we have a great block of material that is concentrated into a very short time. As you will know from Exodus 3 onwards through Leviticus and well on into Numbers, we are dealing with the events of little more than one year. In contrast Exodus 1 and 2 cover many generations; they contain fascinating omissions – Pharaoh's name isn't mentioned but the names of the midwives are! Scholars spend time arguing over the identity of the Pharaoh of Exodus forgetting that for the narrator the Pharaoh does not matter but the midwives do, because they did God's will; consequently Pharaoh's name is much less important than the names of the midwives.

Coming to this great block of material beginning with Sinai and the building of the Tent in the desert, then

going on into Leviticus and Numbers, there are several fascinating points to notice. For example, comparing the regulations for the building of the Tent of Meeting with the seven days of creation, we discover significant parallels. Studying the development of the regulations and the seven days of creation, we uncover interesting cross-connections between them. This is the Creator of the new, the God who will say at the end of Scripture, 'See, I am making everything new'.

From transcendence to imminence

Notice also that the book of Leviticus, lying at the heart of the Pentateuch, is also a mirror of God's own creation. God creates a universe, then within that universe he creates a particular planet, and in that planet he creates a garden, and in that garden he puts a human couple. In the story of redemption, God creates a particular nation, then within the nation he commands a tabernacle be constructed. In that tabernacle is one room, and in that one room is a box, the Ark of the Covenant which contains the tablets of the law.

God from his transcendence is always coming down to reveal himself.

What God is it who the high priest meets in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement? It is that same God who said, 'Let there be light', that same God who said, 'Let us make humans in our own image'. It is the same God who chose a small country and in that country, a mountain city, and in that city, one building; then within that building, one room; finally, in that room, the Ark of the Covenant.

Do you see something of the significance of what is happening? This is not a dull book! It is taking us right into the heart of God. This is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness and who has shone into our hearts as he meets us in Jesus. And Scripture ends, 'I saw no Temple in the city, for the Lord God and the Lamb are there'. So first fit Leviticus into the biblical plot-line.

The main thrust of the book

My second main point concerns the main thrust of Leviticus. The Hebrew title is simply the first word of Leviticus, 'and he called', indicating what the book is about: God calling the people into his presence, or indeed, as we are in a fallen world, calling people *back* to his presence. Having

banned the Tree of Life to humanity, he is beginning to create a way back. The final words of the book are, 'These are the commands the Lord gave Moses on Mount Sinai'. This book is within 'book-ends' – at each end of Leviticus is the word of God calling us to himself. At this stage it is the high priest who enters the divine presence, though he anticipates Jesus Christ.

A window into reality

Thirdly, what is the *genre* of Leviticus? It is difficult to get a word in English that describes the *genre* of Leviticus. Let me invent a phrase. Leviticus is a 'window into reality', the reality of God. Once again a text from Hebrews illustrates this perfectly:

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels... the spirits of the just made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling... (Heb.12:22-24).

How many assemble in your church? That text tells us. What an encouragement when a church is thinly attended! An innumerable company with the spirits of the just! The old prayer says, 'We meet with angels and archangels with all the company of heaven.' Paradoxically, that means sermons on Leviticus must have two contrasting characteristics.

First, they must be marked by clarity. C. S. Lewis said that if you cannot expound your faith simply, either you don't understand it or else don't believe it. But secondly, as well as clarity, our sermons must also have mystery and speak beyond themselves.

Rationalism has often been a curse in the church. In America and Europe are churches which were once flourishing communities where the Word of God was faithfully preached. Many of them have now become Unitarian churches. Why? Because they succumbed to rationalism. They

started only believing and preaching what made sense. But the mystery of the Trinity makes no sense; the Incarnation makes no sense; justification by faith makes no sense. If we are rationalists, none of these resonates reason. Rationalistic sermons lack this biblical reality which we must recapture if we are going to be effective preachers.

Preaching a series on Leviticus

Planning a balanced diet is important. A one-off sermon is like inviting guests and trying to provide comprehensive balance within just one meal. However, a preaching series is more like regular feeding of the family, where balance is provided over the monthly, even yearly, diet. This is one strong argument for expository preaching. There are many passages you would not preach on were you not systematically expounding Scripture. There are many areas you would leave untouched.

My own preaching has been driven by two things. For six months the church is full of students, but for the rest of the year it's a relatively small congregation. However, first, my preaching plan fills a whole year. But second, I want to make sure that when the students are there they get maximum benefit, so I tend to preach two shorter series lasting the ten weeks of the university term. In those circumstances it would be a mistake to do a series on Leviticus, starting at the first chapter and going to the end, thus overlapping terms and continuing out-of-term. I use that as an example. Leviticus naturally falls into six divisions, and, to excite your congregations about it, a six-sermon series would be appropriate. Most congregations could probably take that.

a preaching series is more like regular feeding of the family, where balance is provided over the monthly, even yearly, diet

'Too hot to handle!'

It can be a good idea to give analytical titles to series as well as to sermons, to draw attention to what you want to say. A possible title for your sermon series might be, 'Too Hot to Handle'. Leviticus is a manual of 'radioactive material'; everywhere there are signs, 'Do not touch', 'Keep out', 'This is dangerous'. Very far from being dull, this is explosive material, this is material you do not trifle with (as in the story of Nadab and Abihu).

This makes all the more wonderful that great scene in the Gospels when the curtain in the temple is torn from top to bottom. The 'No Entry' signs are removed, and the way is blazed open into God's presence. 'We have a priest who is there interceding, we have a hope that is surely certain, gone through the curtain and touching the throne.' Reading Leviticus and then turning to New Testament passages like that, one is struck with wonder. We are now allowed daily, moment by moment, to do what only the High Priest could do once a year.

Suggested Sermon Series**Sermon 1****'Presenting living sacrifices'**

The first section of Leviticus is chapters 1-7, which we could call 'Presenting Living Sacrifices'. You will recognize Romans 12:1-2: '...present your bodies living sacrifices'. Paul was thoroughly familiar with the ancient sacrificial terminology and its meaning. One way into this would be to take as an example of the sacrifices the burnt offering in chapter 1. You would not deal with every sacrifice – not that some are unimportant. Rather, when introducing unfamiliar territory of Scripture to people, it is better to open a few windows, and so allow them to see the whole landscape.

Glance briefly at the first chapter:

The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them, 'When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either herd or flock. If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering. It will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him' (1:1-4)

What are we going to say about the burnt offering? First, we will want to emphasize this is God's gracious initiative. It wasn't that Moses sat down and thought, 'Now how on earth, after the golden calf and all the complaining, are we going to enter the presence of God?' 'The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him...' We need to emphasize God taking the first steps towards us.

Secondly, our human response. 'He is to offer a male without defect.' Already in these four verses of this ancient book we have the great plan of salvation: God's initiative calling for human response. 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice.' The mercies of God, that great rescue plan of Romans 1-11, and we respond by presenting ourselves living sacrifices.

What consequences flow from this? Atonement! The sacrifice will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement and to wipe the slate clean. This is the gospel: the bridging of the gulf between the divine holiness and our unholiness. Paying the ransom- 'there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin'. We are already getting into the very heart of chapters 1-7.

Very far from being dull, this is explosive material, this is material you do not trifle with

An important part of expository preaching is the Scriptures being well read

Sermon 2

'We have a priest'

Section 2 is in chapters 8-10. A possible title could be, 'We have a priest' because this is about the ordination of Aaron and his sons. What can we make of this?

Decide how much text should be read. An important part of expository preaching is the Scriptures being well read. With Leviticus we must be careful it is read in such a way as to present its meaning and allow the impact of its thrust to be made: Why do we need a priest?

The first emphasis is what the psalmist calls '**the beauty of holiness**'. The meaning of 'priestly garments' is that holiness is something beautiful, illustrated and exemplified in these vestments. This is something many people have not grasped. In the *Screwtop Letters*, Lewis says holiness is a word that has been deliberately hijacked by the enemy and made to signify dullness, boredom and stuffiness. We must emphasize what an attractive thing holiness is, how powerful it is.

The second point to emphasize is **the danger of holiness**. I refer to the death of Nadab and Abihu:

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu,
took their censers, put fire in
them and added incense offering
unauthorised fire before the Lord,
contrary to his command. So fire
went out from the Lord and
devoured them and they died
(10:1-2).

We emphasize the importance of obedience. So we have the loveliness of our Great High Priest and his total obedience to God. His uniqueness is foreshadowed here by the unique role of Moses. Who normally ordained the High Priest? It was his predecessor but at this point, as there was no

predecessor, Moses uniquely is given this task. A wonderful picture of Christ and his gospel is here; this is an example of preaching Christ from the Old Testament, without stretching or allegorizing the material.

Sermon 3

'The earth is the Lord's'

Section 3 is in chapters 11-15. Moving outwards from the sanctuary, I would use the phrase, 'The Earth is the Lord's', this being the section which deals with food regulations and with such issues as mildew in houses, skin diseases and bodily emissions (which rarely feature in ministers' preaching programmes).

First fit this theme into the big picture. In Eden, everything was good. In the New Jerusalem, that will be the case as well. But here where we are pilgrims and preach the gospel, we are in a world which is not holy. Yet it is a world in which we must live holy lives and which we must claim for Christ.

Now we must sit down and ponder these five chapters. There are two ways of looking at them. First, you could regard them as examples of the most stifling legalism: 'Is there absolutely nothing I can do, no moment of my life when there isn't some regulation covering it?' I suspect that this is the way most of us subconsciously react when reading these chapters.

Second, let's try and think differently. 'There is no moment of my life that is not of eternal significance and part of God's provision to make me like Christ.' Does that not transform it? No longer is it stifling legalism; now everything has eternal significance. R.K. Harrison's laudable commentary on Leviticus takes this section as simply dealing with hygiene. One reviewer, 'This commentary would be of great interest to epidemiologists!' There is some truth in Harrison's treatment, though the hygiene element can be pushed too far.

Surely it's better to see how it is showing that the earth is the Lord's: our bodies and all we do belong to the Lord. The kingdom of God is not

eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, eating and drinking can be activities which are done with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; because the earth is the Lord's!

So far we have seen: first, we are called into the presence of the Holy God; second, we have a Priest who represents us there; yet, third, as we go out into the world, we find that that world also belongs to him. One day the world will know that God is God. Remember Hebrews again, that Christ died outside the sacred enclosure; no longer are there sacred enclosures on earth. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. At this point I omit sermon 4; we'll return to it.

Sermon 5

'The Body is for the Lord'

For section 5, chapters 17-26, I would suggest the title, 'The body is for the Lord'. This would be based on the so-called 'Holiness Code'.

Sermon 6

'What can I give him?'

Finally, section 6 is chapter 27. All about vows, it may seem to some a crashing anti-climax. To lead the way into that sermon, I would use the phrase from the carol, 'What can I give Him?'. Given that the earth is the Lord's, that the Holy God has provided a way back into his presence, that he's provided a priest, that the Day of Atonement has happened once and for all and that our bodies belong to the Lord, how are we going to respond?

All of life must be presented to the Lord as a living sacrifice. In other words, the book ends with God's gracious initiative as it began to which, as it concludes, we respond by offering our bodies as living sacrifices.

The Day of Atonement

Sermon 4

'A Deeper Country'

Section 4 brings us to chapter 16. At the end of C.S. Lewis' final Narnia book, *The Last Battle*, the unicorn

Christ died outside the sacred enclosure; no longer are there sacred enclosures on earth

stamps his foot and says, 'Come on, further up and further in... there's a deeper country'. So here, we move to 'a deeper country' and come to the centre of Leviticus, as Leviticus itself is at the centre of the Pentateuch, I refer to this great chapter on the Day of Atonement:

The Lord spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the most holy place behind the curtain in front of the Atonement cover on the Ark or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the Atonement cover. This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body. He is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. (16:1-5)

This is perhaps one of the clearest windows in the Old Testament into the reality of what happened at Calvary. The High Priest goes through the curtain, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. On top of it, the Atonement cover, which Tyndale evocatively translated 'Mercy Seat' – it's a pity in a way we don't keep that translation because of its associations and powerful imagery.

The High Priest wore linen instead of his elaborate robes. Remember the book of Revelation: 'It was given to

the bride to be clothed in fine linen, which is the righteousness of the saints.' Thus Wesley is able to sing, 'Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown through Christ my own'. A bull and a ram were sacrificed to cleanse the sanctuary, and two goats were chosen, one slaughtered and one sent into the desert.

So what is atonement?

A good way to get into a Biblical passage is to interrogate it. In a chapter like this, which is densely packed theology, liturgy and ceremony, we must ask a number of questions. First we must ask, 'What is atonement?' We still have the idea of payment to *cover* a debt, just as at the Passover the blood of the lamb *covered* the Israelites. So here in verse 34, 'This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.' What is atonement? Such an important question for our people to think through and for those who are Christians continually to thank God for. 'What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me clean again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.' Not very good poetry, but very good theology.

But why these rituals?

The second question is, 'Why these rituals?' I've suggested these are windows into the plan of salvation which was there from the beginning, in the heart of God. In some ways they are like good children's addresses in which we try to give children a window into the reality of the gospel. What this chapter shows is that salvation – atonement – is in the heart and mind of God, and not a desperate emergency measure. The sending of the Lamb of God into the world was not 'Plan B'. Remember these words from 1 Peter 1:18.

You know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver and gold you were redeemed, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without defect. He was

The sending of the Lamb of God into the world was not 'Plan B'

chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Before creation God had already planned salvation in eternity. Before ever there was a sinner on earth, there was a Saviour in Heaven. That is what this passage is showing us. The idea of substitution is in verse 21. 'He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites....' Transferring sin to a substitute. In the Old Testament this reaches its peak in Isaiah 53, where the substitute is no longer a goat, but a Person who alone can be the substitute for the sins of the world.

The High Priest went behind the curtain: 'He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people' (v.33). He has in fact gone into what Lewis calls 'that deeper country'. He has entered the world where God comes down, as the God who came down to Eden to meet with Adam and Eve, the God who one day will dwell with His people. Hebrews takes this up: 'Since have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God... let us approach boldly the throne of grace...' (4:14,16).

Why do we need atonement?

A third question: Why do we need atonement? Why does God not just forgive? – which is the fashionable view in so much modern theology. There is an implicit idea in so much modern theology, even when it's not made explicit, that God should simply wave his hand and forgive. 'The good God will forgive me; that's his job,' said

the Empress Katherine. But when we read the book of Leviticus, we see the blasphemy of that phrase. The holy God is not a private individual who can forgive as you might forgive me if I offend you. God is the Holy One who comes down as fire, whose flaming sword guarded the way back to the Tree of Life, who appeared in the bush that burned but was not consumed and who came down in fire at Sinai.

We stand in danger of collapsing all this into 'do-goodism'. A common idea is that Jesus did something which somehow in some way helps us. And there is in much modern theology a suspicion of being more precise. But in Leviticus, we see there are things that can and must be said. Never assume that because we can't say *everything* we can't say *anything*. The various pictures associated with atonement are ways of looking at the great realities of substitution, propitiation, redemption and victory over the powers of darkness. While all these are part of that great action, at its very heart is the idea of substitution: that to turn away the holy and just anger of God somebody needs to stand in for us; somebody must take the flaming sword and open the way for his brothers and sisters back to the Tree of Life.

A word about the scapegoat (vv.21-23). The goat chosen by lot had to be presented alive before the Lord, and sent into the desert as the scapegoat. In verse 10 the Hebrew text reads, 'The goat shall be given to Azazel' which is a Jewish name for a demon. At the heart of the atonement is the defeat of the hostile cosmic forces, the gods of this world, and as our great High Priest propitiates the wrath of God, God vindicates him by raising him from the dead, and exalting him to heaven.

*Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness like the flood;
When the Prince of Life, our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.*

Scandals in the Church

David Easton, Burnside, Glasgow

The question I propose to address is whether a minister or priest who has been guilty of scandalous behaviour should be restored to office. By scandalous behaviour is meant what in ecclesiastical jargon is called a 'fama clamosa' or public scandal. If the focus of this article is largely on sexual sin, then the reason for this will, I hope, become clear.

Setting the Scene

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2000, which was conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Section 28 and the *Keep the Clause Campaign*, revealed that attitudes towards abortion, premarital sex, and homosexuality had grown markedly more liberal in the past generation. In 1983, 21% of all Scots believed sex before marriage was always wrong; in 2000 only 8% did. The survey showed a similar change in attitudes towards homosexuality. In 1983 six out of ten thought it was always wrong; in 2000 the figure was four out of ten. It is against this shift of attitudes in society at large that we

must see the increased incidence of marital infidelity, and the growing tolerance of homosexual behaviour among church leaders.

Hardly a week passes without the media exposing some scandal involving a churchman. Many readers will know of someone whose misconduct has reached the front page of a tabloid newspaper, and can remember the shock and pain the revelation caused. Some may have been involved in the disciplinary processes which the church has had to carry out at either congregational, presbytery or diocesan level when a colleague has misbehaved. Even more difficult, others may have counselled a colleague who has yielded to a temptation which has destroyed the respect and trust in which his congregation, family and friends held him; the question has been raised whether this is a fit person to be a minister of the gospel.

American survey

A survey of clergy carried out in 1988 by the American journal *Leadership* revealed the extent of the problem then. 1000 were canvassed, 300 responded. Almost one in four

admitted that they had behaved in a way which was inappropriate with a member of the opposite sex. 12% answered 'yes' to the question, 'Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse since entering the ministry?'. When asked about the consequences of such behaviour for themselves, 6% said it had led to divorce and 16% to marriage difficulties; 6% said they had lost their job. However, 30% said that there had been no consequences, and only in 4% of the cases had the church found out. Similar research carried out by the Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary revealed that 37% of ministers had been involved in inappropriate behaviour with some one in the church.

What about Scotland?

These statistics applied to the church in America over a decade ago, but it would be reasonable to surmise that in the intervening years the incidence of sexually inappropriate behaviour among the clergy has increased, and that what is true in America is also true in the UK. Dr Sandy McDonald, until recently General Secretary of the

Board of Ministry of the Church of Scotland, says that during the years he has been in post, what he calls 'behaviour unbecoming of a minister' has been on the increase. Under that rubric he includes not only sexual misdemeanours, but also the incurring of serious debt, and the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Marriage breakdown among ministers, he says, is now close to the national average, and a growing number of clergy have two broken marriages behind them. He also speaks of the growing tolerance which congregations now show to divorced ministers and cites cases where the minister's marriage has broken up, his wife and family have left the manse, he has remained in post, and in time has remarried, in some cases a member of the congregation – and all this has been accepted with apparent equanimity by the congregations concerned.

Historical Survey

I want now to survey the stances which the church has taken historically on the moral failings of the clergy from the early days of the church to the Reformation in order to provide a background against which present approaches to the problem can be seen.

The early church

From New Testament times there are clear statements of the standards of conduct required of elders (e.g. 1 Tim.3.2-7), and we may infer from the link which the New Testament establishes between belief and conduct that those who were not regarded as fit persons to be elders because their doctrine was defective were also debarred from office because their morals were loose.

Moving into the post-New Testament period we have the evidence of *The Didache* which urges that the presbyter who disobeys God's Word should be disqualified because 'he has lied'. Tertullian, whose beady eye scrutinised every aspect of Christian conduct, showed no patience towards morally lapsed members, never

mind those to whom had been entrusted spiritual oversight, especially if they were elders. And the Council of Elvira, which met in Spain in the 4th century, stated in one of the 81 canons which were issued: 'Should bishops, presbyters or deacons, once installed in office, be discovered to be adulterers it is resolved, both because of the offence and because of the impious crime, that they be not allowed into communion even at death'.

The influence of Augustine

However, about this time, the Donatist controversy (whose origins lay in the rejection of Caccilian as bishop of Carthage in 312 because one of those who had laid hands on him had been guilty of compromising the faith during the persecution under Emperor Diocletian) had far-reaching consequences for the way in which the ordained ministry was perceived. Against the Donatists, Augustine argued that, though the church conferred ordination, the right to serve came from God and could not be revoked by the church. Once ordained, always ordained. The moral failings of the bishop or priest could not invalidate the ministry he exercised. In particular the validity of the sacraments were not dependent on his moral character. Augustine's argument won the day.

The consequence was that personal sanctity was no longer seen as essential for ministry. Personal character mattered less than ordination. This led to a greater tolerance of the indiscretions and lapses of those who held office in the church, a tolerance which Roman Catholics have shown in the past and which recently has attracted world-wide media attention.

Monasticism

With the spread of the monastic movement throughout Christendom, vows of chastity were required of priests as well as those who joined the monastic orders. However, for many of the clergy chastity remained an ideal to aspire to rather than a virtue they practised, and concubines were a fact

of life. Sexual sin, while not condoned, was not seen as reason for the removal of a priest from office.

The Roman church in Scotland, however, appeared to take a firmer line. A council of 1225 ruled that priests who behaved inappropriately with penitents, especially women, were to be severely treated. Bishops were to appoint confessors in their dioceses. In England the supervision of clergy was placed in the hands of archdeacons who were required to put to them set questions, and then report to the bishop on their diligence and behaviour. Discipline was administered by the bishops' courts.

The Reformation

In the reformed church the title priest was replaced by that of minister. The focus of ministry was no longer the altar but the pulpit where the Word was preached. However, it was not enough for ministers to communicate the gospel in words. It was expected that they should also embody the message they preached, and exhibit in their lives the love and holiness of God. *The Register of the Company of Pastors*, a collection of documents kept in Geneva between 1541 and 1564, has this to say:

In order to obviate all scandals of conduct, it will be needful to have a form of discipline for ministers... to which all are to submit themselves. This will help to ensure that the minister is treated with respect, and the Word of God is not brought into dishonour and scorn by the evil fame of ministers. Moreover, as discipline will be imposed on him who merits it, so also there will be need to suppress slanders and false reports that may easily be uttered against those who are innocent.

It must be noted that there are crimes which are altogether intolerable in a minister (e.g. heresy, schism, open blasphemy, treachery, perjury, drunkenness,

assault punishable by laws, usury, offences bearing civil infamy, and fornication, etc.) and faults which may be endured (e.g. buffoonery, negligence in the study of Scripture, rashness, dissolute language, deceitfulness, defamation, evil scheming, uncontrolled anger, etc.) provided a fraternal admonition is offered.

Calvin comments on this list of offences:

With regard to offences which ought under no circumstance to be tolerated, if they are civil offences, that is to say, those which are punishable by law, and any minister is guilty of them, the Seigneury (body of elders) shall take the matter in hand, and over and above the ordinary punishment customarily imposed on others, shall punish him by deposing him from his office.

Luther, in Germany, showed a similar zeal in rooting out ministers whose conduct did not commend the gospel. In his *Table Talk* we read: 'I have obtained of the Prince Elector that a prison be built for the punishment and discipline of offensive ministers and preachers.'

Knox's Scotland

In Scotland the *First Book of Discipline* laid great stress on the need for elders and ministers to be of good reputation.

To discipline must all the Estates within this realm be subject, as well the rulers as they that are ruled; yea, and the preachers themselves as well as the poorest within the Kirk... Because the eye and mouth of the Kirk ought to be most single and comprehensible, the life and conversation of the minister ought to be diligently tried... The credit and success of the gospel much depending on the entire credit and reputation of ministers, their sound doctrine and holy

conversation, no stain thereof ought lightly to be received, nor, when it comes before a judicature ought it to be negligently enquired into, or when found evident, ought it to be slightly censured.

To ensure that both ministers and elders were held accountable for their doctrine and life superintendents were appointed to keep a watchful eye on ministers, and a system of Privy Censures was devised whereby the minister was required by the Presbytery to comment on the life and doctrine of each of his elders, and the

this procedure of mutual rebuke hardly encouraged either minister or elders to speak well of each other

elders, likewise, were each asked, one by one, to report on the character and teaching of their minister. In the case of a stubborn and disobedient minister the elders could complain to the ministers of the two adjacent parishes 'where men of greater gravity are'. Deposition could result if the Presbytery and the Superintendent concurred. This procedure of mutual rebuke hardly encouraged either minister or elders to speak well of each other, and fell into abeyance as did the office of superintendent.

However, the concern that ministers should practise what they preach was a right one. In the words of Richard Baxter, 'Is that man likely to do much good, or fit to be a minister of Christ, that will speak for him an hour, and by his life preach against him all the week beside?'

Biblical standards

Before we turn to present day responses to inappropriate conduct in ministers we need to ask what light Scripture sheds on the matter. The qualities required of those who hold office in the church are set out in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, and Titus 1:6-9. The

requirements listed may be subsumed under the three phrases 'above reproach', 'the husband of one wife' and 'a good reputation with those outside the church'.

- **above reproach (or blameless)** has to do with moral character; those appointed should be of such standing that no one can regard them as unfit for the task.

- **the husband of one wife** has been variously interpreted:

the one appointed should not be a polygamist, though that meaning is unlikely as polygamy was not common in society in NT times

The key question is whether those who have sinned... , can continue to serve as ministers

he should not be a divorcee, let alone a divorcee who has remarried: this understanding is difficult to square with other passages of Scripture such as Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:15 which appear to permit divorce in certain circumstances, and by implication to allow remarriage, at least in the case described by Paul in 1 Corinthians

he should be a 'one-woman man': this is the most likely meaning and Paul is simply saying that those who hold office in the church should be persons who are true and faithful to their wives

- **a good reputation...** with those outside the church: the issue is what people outside the church think about this man's character; if with reason he is perceived to be of flawed character then he should not hold office.

The key question is whether those who have sinned in a manner which means that they are no longer 'above reproach' and of 'good reputation with those outside the church', can continue to serve as ministers, assuming that they have confessed to

their sin, repented, and renounced the behaviour which brought about their fall. There are three possible answers to the question.

1. Immediate restoration to office (by 'immediate' is meant a period of a year or less).

2. Restoration to office after a period of time (one to five years) to allow for counselling, personal recovery, and the healing of broken relationships.

3. No restoration to office.

Interpreting biblical standards

We must now look at the arguments advanced in support of each answer.

1. Immediate restoration to office.

In support of this answer, the following points can be made. First, Scripture contains examples of men who were restored by God after they had sinned, e.g. David and Peter. Second, if God forgives and restores to service those who confess and repent of their sins, and does so without delay, as in the cases of David and Peter, should not the church also forgive and restore to office those who have sinned? Third, not to allow a minister to resume his ministry is to treat him differently from other members of the church. He, with them, is only a servant of Christ to whom alone he is accountable. (See Rom. 14:4 and Jas. 4:12) Fourth, sexual sin is no worse than other sins. Paul includes sexual immorality along with other sins (e.g. Gal. 5:19-21.) Sin is sin. If a fit of rage does not debar a man from ministry, then why should adultery?

2. Restoration to office after a period of time.

Those who advocate this argue that immediate restoration is neither wise nor practical. Time must be allowed for recovery, which should include counselling, the complete disclosure of all relevant facts, clear evidence of genuine repentance, reconciliation with family and others who have been sinned against and some form of restitution to the injured parties. The time required for the process of recovery will vary according to the circumstances, and will be determined by what answers are given to such

the question is whether a minister who has been suspended from office for conduct which constitutes a fama clamosa should have his suspension lifted and be given a practising certificate?

questions as: how far back does the sinful behaviour extend, how many people are implicated, did he confess and repent before or after being found out? There is also the question of whether such a person's ministry can ever be the same again. However, while due weight must be given to all these considerations, the desired outcome will always be restoration.

The argument for restoration is buttressed by the consideration that the minister who has fallen and been restored may now by God's grace become a 'wounded healer', or a 'broken shepherd'. What he has learned from his fall into sin will enable him to be a better pastor. There is, however, the recognition among those who advocate restoration after a period of time that the process is fraught with questions.

Certainly, when leaders fall, there is the responsibility to love, forgive, and receive them back into the body of Christ. But does genuinely forgiving their sin mean they should remain our leaders? If we fail to return leaders to office, does that mean we don't love them or we hold their sin against them? If the sin were the only obstacle to leadership restoration would be tied exclusively to receiving forgiveness. But far too often individual sins reflect the more troublesome problem of a flawed character. For this reason, repentance and forgiveness are prerequisites for entering the restoration process, not qualifications for completing the time process.

3. No restoration to office.

This stance appeals to certain passages of Scripture. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 implies adultery is different to other

sins; Paul asserts that God himself acts to avenge the wronged person. Calvin comments on 1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

Having set before us honourable conduct [Paul] now shows us how we ought to abhor fornication, setting before us the enormity of its wickedness and baseness. Now he shows us its greatness by comparison – that this sin alone, of all sins, puts a brand of disgrace upon the body. The body, it is true, is defiled also by theft, and murder, and drunkenness.... My hand, it is true, is defiled by murder or theft, my tongue by speaking evil, or perjury, and the whole body by drunkenness; but fornication leaves a stain impressed upon the body, such as is not impressed upon it from other sins.

Calvin makes the point that sexual immorality is in a class by itself. But he does not give sufficient weight to the connection which Paul makes between our bodies and Christ (v.15). Prior comments: 'This is extraordinarily bold language: our physical bodies are limbs of Christ, and Paul's rhetorical question (*Do you not know this?*) reveals how fundamental is this union with the risen Lord.'

The relationship is, of course, spiritual (v.17), but it is nevertheless our bodies which are the temples of the Holy Spirit (v.19). Sexual sin is in a category of its own because it involves the Christian in an illicit 'one body' relationship outside marriage which cannot be reconciled with the 'one spirit' relationship between the

believer and the Lord. More than that, the body, which God has redeemed at great cost (v.19b-20a), has become the temple of the Holy Spirit (v.19a) and is destined for resurrection (v.14), has been put to a use which is contrary to God's redemptive purpose. Fee writes, 'Thus the unique nature of sexual sin is not so much that one sins against oneself, but against one's own body as viewed in terms of its place in redemptive history.'

Much weight is given by some to 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. While there is disagreement among commentators as to whether the disqualification Paul speaks of refers to loss of heavenly reward, or loss of salvation, the eschatological perspective is not disputed: we shall all have to give account of our stewardship of the gospel. It follows that if it is possible to be disqualified in the world to come, then it is also possible to be disqualified in the here and now. The argument is from the greater danger (disqualification on the final day) to the lesser danger (disqualification here and now).

In the Kirk today

In my own Church of Scotland context the question is whether a minister who has been suspended from office for conduct which constitutes a *fama clamosa* should have his suspension lifted and be given a practising certificate? The prevailing assumption is that he should, whether after a short or more lengthy period of time, provided that he has repented and sought and received forgiveness. However, this assumption is open to objection. While Scripture does not provide clear-cut guidance on the matter, the following considerations should shape our thinking.

Ministers to be judged more strictly

First, like it or not, a minister is in a different category from other members of the church. Calvin comments on 1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

My life (as a minister) ought to be a kind of rule to others. Accordingly, I strive to conduct myself in such a manner that my character and conduct may not be inconsistent with my doctrine, and that I may not, with great disgrace to myself, and a grievous occasion of offence to my brothers, neglect those things which I require from others.

Gregory the Great (540-604) said, 'He who is required by the necessity of his position to speak the highest things, is compelled by the same necessity to exemplify the highest timings' (cf. Jas.3:1).

Second, it is naive to think that sexual sin is no different to other sins. It has a high profile. It destroys the trust between minister and congregation upon which effective ministry depends. The minister is no longer 'above reproach' or 'blameless' in the eyes of his congregation. Nor does he have 'a good reputation with those outside the church'.

Long-term consequences

Third, the fact of forgiveness does not necessarily remove the long-term consequences of sin. That God – and therefore the church – forgives, goes without saying. That the minister who has repented and been restored might enter new avenues of Christian service where his gifts can be employed, but which, in terms of the Church of Scotland, do not require a practising certificate, is not denied either. But does the fact that he has been forgiven by God, his family, and the church, mean that there is now no bar to having his practising certificate restored so he can pick up again the threads of his former ministry? I would argue repentance and forgiveness do not of themselves open the door for the deposed minister to return to ministry. Forgiveness does not relieve the sinner from facing up to the long-term consequences of sin.

does the fact that he has been forgiven by God, his family, and the church, mean that there is now no bar to having his practising certificate restored so he can pick up again the threads of his former ministry?

Conclusion

We began by asking the question: Should a minister who has been suspended or deposed for sexual immorality be restored? I would hesitate to say 'Never', but the case against restoration is more compelling than the case for. The balance of Scripture's teaching is against. The restoration of Peter by our Lord is often cited in support of restoration, but Peter's sin (before Pentecost, note) was different and not sin against the body; it did not involve blatant hypocrisy, living a lie, or that deliberate disobedience of God's commands over a period of time which characterises most sexual sin. At most Peter's restoration is an exception to the rule.

However, to say that restoration in almost all cases is not an option is not to say that those who fall may not be rehabilitated and prove to be effective servants of Christ and the church in some other capacity, perhaps with some para-church organisation, or in one of the many forms of ministry which are now exercised in most denominations. But it is hard to see how he could return as preacher and pastor in a congregation.

The procedures for dealing with *fama clamosa* are clearly set out and explained in Andrew Herron's *The Law and Practice of the Kirk* (p.240ff). However, conduct which in the past would have led to deposition, now merits suspension only, with the expectation that the suspension will be lifted after a relatively short time. In some cases, no action is taken at all, either because no formal complaint has been made against the minister, or

because it is felt that sleeping dogs should be left to lie. In other cases, ministers who have behaved inappropriately have been allowed (or, indeed, even encouraged) to demit their charges for 'private and personal reasons' before their conduct has become public knowledge, thus avoiding scandal and pre-empting a formal complaint. However, because no written record exists of why the minister wished to demit, there is nothing to stop the minister receiving a practising certificate and, after a lapse of time, applying for another charge. I understand the Principal Clerk has instructed presbytery Clerks that no minister should be allowed to demit his charge in such circumstances without the reasons for his demission being stated in a Record Apart.

Some are unhappy that presbyteries discipline their own members. Would it not be better, where there is a case to be answered, if the inquiry were carried out by another presbytery? Better still, the setting up of an independent body akin to the BMA's ethical standards committee, with powers to suspend and depose, would ensure that discipline was exercised in a consistent manner throughout the church. At present, what would result in certain deposition in one presbytery is matter of temporary suspension in another presbytery. There are some presbyteries which turn a blind eye to flagrant cases of immorality.

Behaviour unbecoming of a minister will almost certainly increase. For the sake of Christ's honour, the good name of the church and the integrity of ministry, it is high time the church reviewed its approach to the problem.

Farewell to David Searle & Happy 21st Birthday to Rutherford House



David and Lorna Searle with the Chairman of the Trustees,
Prof. David Wright

December 4th, 2002, had been planned for the occasion of saying farewell to David and Lorna Searle on their retirement from Rutherford House where they have both worked since 1993. However, with David being asked to stay on part-time until Dr Bob Fyall takes over in September 2003, and therefore his final retirement being postponed until 31st August, 2003, it was decided to combine his 'Retirement Dinner' with the celebration of the 21st birthday of the first meeting of the Rutherford House Council on 4th December 1983. The event was held in the National Trust House in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh. Present were the Trustees and members of staff with their spouses as appropriate.

David has worked tirelessly as Warden for the past ten years. In that time he has built up the work of the House in numerous ways, so seeking to fulfil the aim of *encouraging effective ministry*. The House building has been extended and internally transformed. It is now a most comfortable place for ministers and others to stay. The bedrooms are all *en suite* and the kitchen and study facilities superb. Many who have come for a rest or a quiet time of study have appreciated the peace and quiet and time to reflect.

David has always tried to make himself available to the guests and many have found that helpful. Having had a very fruitful ministry as a pastor and preacher for many years before coming to Rutherford House, David has had a real burden for the ministers and their needs, particularly that of training others to preach, and to pastor. He has had a particular ability to impart much of what he learnt in those years to others, especially in the Practical Theology seminars in the House and in Northern Ireland.



'Parting is such sweet sorrow'!



Rutherford House 21st Birthday Cake

Under David's direction the first Scottish Ministry Assembly was held in St George's Tron Church, Glasgow in 1999 with over 400 ministers and church leaders attending. This year the third Scottish Ministry Assembly will take place there and already the speakers taking part, and the increased number of registrations so far, promise to make this conference a landmark in the history of Scottish Evangelicalism. (see back cover for further information of SMA.) The SMA has alternated with the Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics which has gone from strength to strength during David's time.

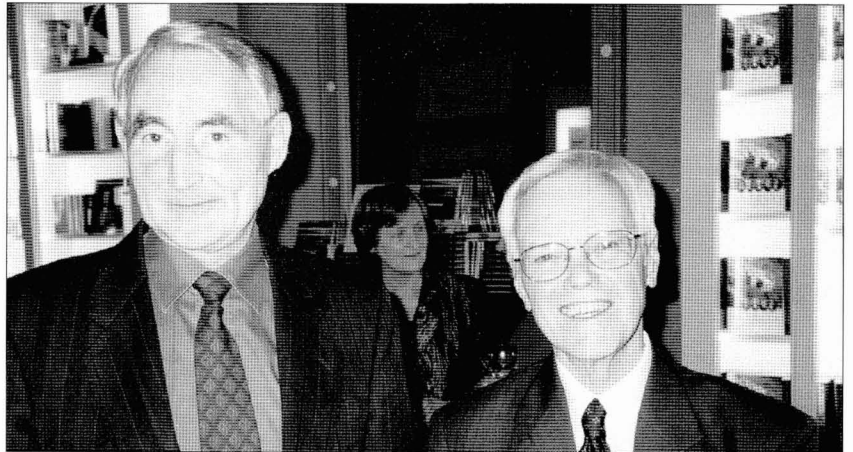
Many of David's weekends were spent holding elders' training conferences in churches and presbyteries all over Scotland, Ireland and Wales. (Our thanks should also go to Lorna at this point for her sacrificial 'lending' of him to us at those times!)

Not only did David travel in the UK but his visits to Brazil, Australia and Delhi Bible Institute in particular, were of lasting significance to many pastors in their ministries there.

The publishing side of the work of Rutherford House has continued to flourish as David edited, encouraged authors, negotiated contracts with publishers, and much more. One innovation of his which will surely live on is this very Journal that you are now reading.

Lorna, as well as being the Catering Convenor for the House, has given tremendous practical support during that time. Her creativity has instigated many of the ideas that David implemented.

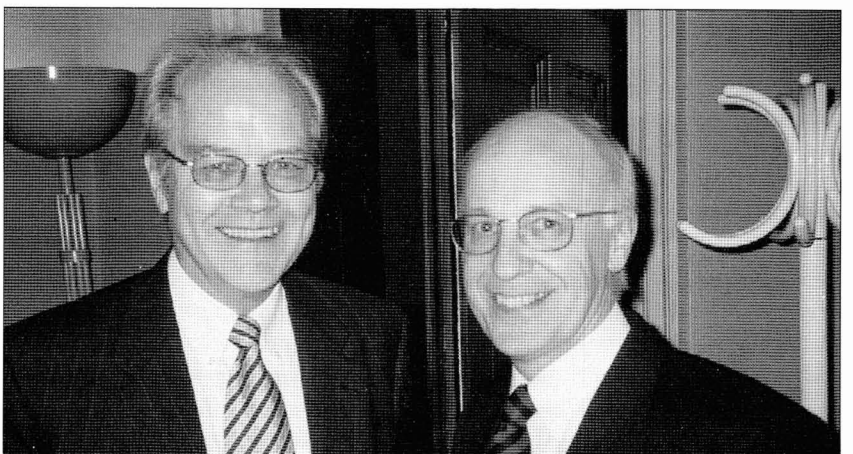
Both Lorna and David have travelled 'the extra mile' many times on behalf of God's work in Rutherford House, and to them both we offer our heartfelt thanks and wish them God's continued blessing on all they do in their retirement.



Duncan Martin, Treasurer, and Derek Prime



(Left to right) Greta Alexander, Ann Allen, Heather Lyall and Edith Easton



Fergus MacDonald and Andrew Anderson, Secretary

David and

1 Samuel 17

No narrative in the Old Testament is more dramatic than the battle between David and Goliath. The scene is carefully set. The Philistines and the Israelites were at war. There was nothing new in that. They were a constant threat to Israel. They were one of the many nations God used 'to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses' (Judg.3:4).

The Philistines had taken up position on one hill with the Israelites on another hill, a valley separating the two armies. Saul, the first king of Israel, had proved a disaster. He failed to obey God's clear commands. God had indicated to Samuel that David was to be Saul's successor, and Samuel had already anointed him. However, all this was unknown to any other than David's family. His anointing, however, is an important aspect to the background of this incident. Though David's father was well advanced in years, David himself was not with Saul's fighting forces. However, his three oldest brothers were.

As the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, David was considered too young for military service. From time to time, however, his father dispatched him to visit his brothers. That is how David now appears on the scene. He was sent to see how his brothers were, and to bring back some news from them. David entrusted his flock to a shepherd, and left with a half-bushel of roasted grain and ten loaves of bread for his brothers. In addition, his father gave him ten cheeses for the commander of their unit. He arrived at the camp, just as the army was going to its battle positions, 'shouting the war cry'. As David greeted his brothers, Goliath stepped out from the Philistine lines and shouted his challenge.

The narrative draws a dramatic contrast between the apparent strength of Goliath and the apparent inferiority of David. Goliath's words were defiant. His bold insolence terrified the Israelites. He shouted, 'Do you need a whole army to settle this? Choose someone to fight for you, and I will represent the Philistines. We will settle this dispute in single combat! If your man is able to kill me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him,

you will be our slaves! I defy the armies of Israel! Send me a man who will fight with me.'

Only someone supremely confident of victory would have uttered such a challenge. The Israelites' morale was at its lowest. No one had volunteered, not even King Saul, who was head and shoulders taller than any of his people.

Goliath had been a fighting man from his youth. The Philistines' champion, he was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet and a bronze coat of scale armour weighing about 125 pounds or 57 kilograms. He also wore bronze leggings. He had a bronze javelin slung on his back, a spear whose shaft was like a weaver's beam, its iron point weighing about 15 pounds or 7 kilograms. And he had a sword. Ahead of him went his shield-bearer.

David is now brought into the picture. He is going to be God's answer to Goliath's challenge. David is uniquely qualified, although Goliath does not know it, because David is God's anointed! By drawing attention to David's youth, the narrator accentuates the contrast between the two men. Hearing Goliath's challenge,

Goliath

A Sermon by Derek Prime, Edinburgh

David at once declares his willingness to fight him. His words are reported to Saul, who sends for him. Saul's reaction to David was not much better than Goliath's. When Goliath looked David over, he 'saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him'. He said, 'Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks? Come here', he said, 'and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.'

The fall of Goliath did more than simply defeat the Philistines. It brought to notice the future king of Israel – David, God's anointed servant. The chapter presents us with several clear messages.

The Challenge of Failure

We must not forget the significant comment in Judges. Skirmishes like this were intended to test the Israelites to see if 'they would obey the Lord's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses' (Judg.3:4). The foremost command they received was to love God and to care for his honour. He was not, however, in their thoughts at this time, and they displayed no concern for his praise and

reputation in their situation. Hence the nation's failure.

Failure is inevitable when we are disobedient to God. It often comes about through defective obedience and lack of faith. It can be a hard discipline to humble us. We experience both personal and corporate failure. We tend to think more often, however, of personal failure to the neglect of corporate failure. This chapter focuses on the corporate failure of the people of God, and that is where our focus must be.

Failure brings fear

Failure, once it occurs, tends to be repeated. Each time he issued his challenge over the forty days, the more formidable Goliath appeared. Thus we see failure brings fear. Failure is often prompted by what we see, by our perception of things. The sight of Goliath caused the Israelites to run from him in great fear. Fear makes us cowards. Failure prompts dismay when the challenge reappears. 'On hearing the Philistine's word, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.'

Our failure prompts us to condemn ourselves. It makes us fragile in our relationships and critical of others, especially if their better attitude shames us. David's oldest brother, Eliab, burned with anger when David appeared on the scene. He completely misjudged David. A bad conscience or jealousy may well have stirred his anger as he heard David offer to confront Goliath.

When we fail to respond as we ought in battles we then readily resort to merely human reasoning. Like Saul's words to David, we say, 'You' or 'We' 'are not able'. The challenge of failure is all the greater when we remember *who* we are, and *whom* we profess to serve. The Israelites sadly saw themselves merely as Saul's servants rather than God's. They knew that Saul himself was no match for Goliath, and not one of them was. *However, that was not the issue!*

If we belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, we are God's people. We bear his Name. We have a far greater enemy than Goliath who challenges us. We tend to forget him and underestimate his reality. John Bunyan had great spiritual insight when he

described the devil as both Giant Despair and Apollyon. Satan knows how to prompt both despair and fear. Apollyon was 'hideous to behold: he was clothed with scales like a fish (they are his pride); he had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion.'

David was prepared to take on the enemy of God's people. Why? Because he *had perception of the real issues*. When failure comes, we all too readily think primarily of its reflection upon us personally. Pride holds a greater place in our thinking than we may be prepared to admit. We fight a battle against it to the end of our lives.

Writing to a friend, C. H. Spurgeon said, 'My Master is the only One who can humble me. My pride is so infernal that there is not a man on earth who can hold it in, and all their silly attempts are futile; but then my Master can do it, and he will. Sometimes, I get such a view of my own insignificance that I call myself all the fools in the world for even letting pride pass my door without frowning at him.'¹

The failure of God's people was that their behaviour did not reflect God's character

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones acknowledged that a particular attack the devil made upon him was an appeal to his pride: 'Not my pride in the ministry but my carnal pride.... It was a terrible thing, it was the thing that revealed to me ultimately the pride of the human heart. I knew I was a sinner without any hope at all, but I never realised the depth of the pride of the human heart. Eventually I saw it was nothing but pride. Carnal, devilish pride And I was humbled to the ground.'²

Failure brings dishonour to God

Israel was not only challenged, but also demoralised as no one from their camp went out to meet Goliath's challenge.

David perceived that more was at stake than the mere defeat of Israel. He recognised the challenge was not Goliath's defiance of the Israelites as a people but his defiance of them as the people of God. See how clearly he expressed this: 'David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied' ' (v.45).

The crux was that Goliath was defying the living God. The theme of his defiance is very much present. In verse 10 Goliath says he mocks and defies the ranks of Israel. In verse 25 Israel's troops tell of his defiance. David recognised this mockery of Israel was contempt of God. He stressed this both to Saul and to Goliath's face.

The real issue was the honour of God's name. Everyone who knew anything at all about Israel knew their Exodus history and the God they professed to serve as the one true God. God's reputation was at stake. David saw that any failure of Israel as God's people reflected on God. Listen to him: 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?' No wonder David was described as 'a man after God's own heart.'³ David's purpose as he went into battle was clear. He said to Goliath, 'Today... the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.'

David interpreted Goliath's words as a challenge to God himself. His words, 'Can't I even speak?' (v.29) may be translated, 'Is there not a cause?' In other words, 'Should not every true Israelite be fired by holy zeal and indignation when the honour of God is at stake, and when his name is blasphemed?'

The failure of God's people was that their behaviour did not reflect God's character. God is living (v.26), but they behaved as if he were dead. God is almighty (v.45), but they behaved as if he were powerless. God is the faithful keeper of his covenant (v.26), but they behaved as if he were indifferent to their situation. God was

able to deliver, but they behaved as if he could not. David saw that the battle was not merely physical, but spiritual. Can we not identify with Israel in their failure to be and live as the people of God? We desperately need the perception of the real issues at stake that David possessed. Notice next what David's perception brought about.

The Vital Response of Faith

Israel seems to have been almost devoid of faith. Certainly there is no evidence of it in the narrative. That was part of the explanation for their failure. 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'⁴ Faith has to be clear about its object: David's eyes were neither upon himself nor upon his enemy, but upon the Lord.

Knowledge of God

The foundation of faith is the knowledge of God's Name. David said to Goliath, 'You come against me with sword... I come against you in *the name* of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied'. God's name represents all that he has revealed himself to be. It is in our Lord Jesus Christ that God has supremely and uniquely made known his Name; he has revealed His glory in the face of his Son. In Christ 'all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form'.⁵ For us the proper object of faith is the Lord Jesus.

The 'name' stands for God's character and, as we read the passage, we see how David's eyes were on God's attributes. First, he trusted God as 'the living God'. God is the source and upholder of all life. To know him is life, and to be separated from him is to be spiritually dead. As the living God, he speaks and acts. This distinguishes him from all idols and attests his vitality, creative power and providential activity. As the living God, He is the One to whom we may come with prayers and cries for help.

Second, David trusted God as the Lord Almighty. God's omnipotence is an essential part of his sovereignty. To think of God with understanding is to

remember his power and unbounded resources. All powers are subject to him. All other power is derived. It was by his power that the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Where we are weak, God is strong.

Third, David trusted God as the faithful, covenant-keeping God. Significantly, David described Goliath as 'this uncircumcised Philistine', reminding himself and his fellows of their covenant relationship with God. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, an indication that he and his descendants were the people of promise.

David recognised that God is always true to his covenant, faithful to his promises. This is why the writer to the Hebrews, having talked about the exploits of people like David, urges us, 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith'.⁶ With our eyes upon him, when confronted by challenges to God's honour, we say with David, 'Who is this... that he (or it) should defy the armies of the living God?'

The foundation of faith is the knowledge of God's Name

Faith's objectives

David's objectives were plain: first, that the whole world should know that there was a God in Israel; second, that those who observed the battle would know that it was not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; third, that the battle is the Lord's. This is a principle frequently repeated throughout the Bible. 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.'⁷ David wanted God to be acknowledged as the living God in opposition to the dead gods of the Philistines.

The faith David professed had already proved God's power to save. His life had been full of God's deliverances. He gave his testimony

about this to Saul. We have only to read some of David's songs in the *Book of Psalms* to appreciate how real an experience deliverance was to him. It is a particular theme of Psalm 34:1-7. He had been afflicted (v.2), fearful (v.4), depressed (v.5), in trouble (v.6), and as he sought the Lord (v.4), looked to him (v.5) and called upon him (v.6), the Lord had delivered him. David had come to learn that when he was weak, then he was strong if his trust was in God.

Looking back, looking forward

Looking back on his experience of God enabled David to look forward in faith. The same was true of our Lord Jesus Christ. The defeat of Satan in the early days of our Lord's ministry was a preparation for Satan's defeat at Calvary. Faith's experience of God in the past provides a solid basis for the future. Confident in God's Name, and the priority of his honour, David's spirit was that of Romans 8:31, 'What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?'

The passage is an illustration of 1 Corinthians 1:26-31:

'Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.''

Every deliverance of God's people in the Old Testament tends to prefigure

Faith's experience of God in the past provides a solid basis for the future

the coming of the Great Deliverer, our Lord Jesus. Types of our Lord are found in the Old Testament. This is especially the case here in that David appears on the scene as the one whom God has just anointed to be Israel's king.

Special care needs to be exercised in talking about 'types'. However, our caution must not mean that we avoid them altogether. We are safe if we use only those types to which the Bible itself points. Types are the shadows of the good things to come to which the writer to the Hebrews refers.

David a type of Christ

David was not only the ancestor of Christ but he was the greatest personal type of Christ in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus is spoken of as the seed or Son of David. 'Son of David' was a Messianic title. It was the standard title for the Messiah among the Jews. Through Jeremiah God declares, 'The days are coming when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our Righteousness'.⁸

David was the man God chose and in whom he delighted. Our Saviour was the One whom the Father chose and sent, and in whom he was well pleased. David received the Spirit of God to do mighty deeds for the saving of Israel, just as the saviours in Judges did. Our Saviour was the Anointed One, the One who received the Spirit without limit.⁹ David slew Goliath as the anointed one of God. Our Saviour overcame Satan and all our enemies as the Messiah, God's Spirit-anointed Servant. David overcame Goliath with a weapon Goliath scorned. Our Saviour overcame Satan with the Cross, a weapon that those that witnessed it despised and scorned. How weak that Cross seemed!

Having caused Goliath to fall to the ground, David used Goliath's own weapon to cut off his head. Our Lord Jesus took Satan's own weapon – death

— and by it overcame him and all his works. Our Saviour shared in our flesh and blood and died for us 'that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'.¹⁰

David triumphed over all his foes, while the people stood by until they could share in it. God's Anointed One won the victory over sin and death on our behalf so that we might share in its fruits. David's victory was good news that gave the people joy and peace (18:6). Our Saviour's victory through the Cross is the good news that brings everlasting joy and peace. The Lord Jesus is our perfect Champion! It is upon him that our eyes are to be, for this is the secret of faith in its beginnings and in its perfecting.

Finally let us look honestly at the application for today.

Illustrations of Failure

Let me suggest three frequent areas of failure, prompted by particular circumstances of which I am aware, and which are probably not untypical. The first is that of the failure of Christians in marriage. The failure rate of marriages in contemporary society is high, with marriage being dispensed with by many. Inevitably perhaps, more Christians are involved in marriage failure than in previous generations.

The age-old triangle

Let me illustrate. A husband, because of his involvement in a church committee, becomes close to an unmarried female member of the committee. Unwisely, he gives her time because she asks him for help both in spiritual and practical ways. She invites him into her home, and foolishly, he accepts and spends time with her without his wife's knowledge. No physical adultery takes place. However, the wife becomes aware of the situation as her friends comment upon it. She confronts her husband with what she knows. She discovers that the relationship is more long-

*this is the secret of
faith in its beginnings
and in its perfecting*

standing than she appreciated, and it explains why he had been so often late home from work. He is genuinely repentant, although perhaps still naive about letting himself get into such a situation. The wife threatens divorce. She thinks better of it, but she finds it very difficult to forgive and especially to forget. The situation ruins their testimony and curtails their service in the church fellowship. It is a situation of failure. Will they find God's way out?

Ecclesiastical coup d'etat

The second illustration is a different failure in relationships — the criticism of a pastor by members of the church fellowship. The pastor is faithful and diligent. He has been with the church a number of years. Some of his fellow leaders have attended conferences about church growth and evangelism and, either consciously or unconsciously, have their own agenda. The pastor is uncomfortable with some of the proposals made, and honestly says so, although he wants progress as much as they do. His fellow-leaders then decide that he must go. The church is persuaded to sack him. Some members are devastated. The instigators feel that now they can implement their programmes. The pastor and his family are demoralised. The consequences for him, his wife and children are immense. It is a situation of failure. It cannot be undone. Will it happen again?

An irrelevant church

The third example is of failure in evangelism by a local church and its members. A church has become inward-looking. Its preoccupation is with worship and fellowship to the neglect of the lost all around it. Various schemes for outreach are tried, but without vital commitment from every church member. As Eliab criticised David, so Christians may become very critical of those who try to be innovative in outreach. As a result, the church is not seen as relevant in the community, and because the church is not seen as relevant, God is

God's honour is at stake. That is the priority issue

regarded as irrelevant. It is a situation of failure, especially when we remember our Saviour's final command to His Church. How can it be reversed?

The real issues

What is the critical issue in each situation? It is one of insight. While in the case of Christian marriage breakdown, much help may come from counselling and the use of common sense, confidence in God and the will to trust him are imperative. Has not every Christian marriage partner given testimony to the truth that the Lord Jesus makes a difference to the whole of life? Are not children a trust from the Lord, for whom we are to provide role models? The primary motivation for a Christian couple is not simply their own happiness, but God's honour – his good name among their relatives, friends and neighbours.

When relationships break down between Christians, as in the case of a pastor and his congregation, our eyes need to be on the example, power and promises of the Lord himself. Is not our corporate life meant to be an anticipation of heaven? Is not our church life meant to show to the world how attractive the gospel of Christ is? The motivation must not be the following of some hidden agenda, but honestly asking, 'What will honour God's Name?'

What about our failures in evangelism? Evangelism is important not only from the point of view of those needing to be reached, but because of the honour of God's Name in the honouring of his Son, and the way in which he is uniquely glorified by the gospel. Is there anything that causes a man or woman to give glory and praise to God more than understanding and believing the good news of His Son?

In all our corporate failures, we need to perceive the real issues. In

relationships, our concern is not primarily to have our own way or to gain personal happiness, but to be concerned for the praise of our Lord. In our actions, we are to have our eyes upon the effect our actions will have upon others, for Christ warns us against causing little ones to stumble. I am sure we can identify other areas of failure, but these show how relevant the lessons of this incident are.

Conclusions

Honesty about our failures

We dare not neglect complete honesty and truthfulness, hard though they are to achieve. The greatest sin is not failure but failure to get up again. One of the blessings of failures is that they make us aware of our dependence upon our Lord Jesus Christ. We often learn more by disasters than successes: successes can make us proud; failures cut us down to size.

Identify the vital issues

David asked, 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?' It is those whose zeal is for God's glory, and not their own credit or advancement, who may hope to be instruments of great usefulness in the Church and in the world.

Exercise faith personally and corporately

We must stop looking to ourselves for deliverance; we are to look to the Lord. That will determine how we face up to challenging situations. Without faith, David would have been a pessimist; with faith, he could be an optimist. Faith recognises God is always the same. The help God had given in the past to David, when he was looking after his sheep, would be with him as he faced Goliath. Faith

grows as we look at our Saviour and all that He is to us, now and forever!

Faith uses the privilege of prayer

The state and health of our prayer life and our corporate prayer says much about our concern for God's honour and our perception of the real issues.

Finally, notice how David was dressed in the armour of Ephesians 6:10-20.

- his strength was in the Lord
- he had no doubt about the identity of the enemy
- he was determined to stand against Goliath for the sake of God's honour
- he knew for the truth, for the reputation of God
- his cause was righteous: he must defend God's honour
- he wore the gospel shoes: his witness would glorify God
- his salvation would be from the God who saved him from lion and bear
- his real weapon was faith in God's word – the sword of the Spirit.
- he prayed as he went against the enemy
- he stood firm and the battle was the Lord's

'When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout....' The shout of the King was among them! Thus it is when the Lord Jesus is among His people. No wonder David prayed in Psalm 14: 'Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!'

Endnotes

¹ *Letters of Spurgeon*, p.57.

² Iain Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, Vol.2, p.208.

³ Acts 13:22

⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵ Colossians 2:9

⁶ Hebrews 12:2

⁷ Zechariah 4:6

⁸ Jeremiah 23:5-6; cf. also Ezekiel 34:23 24

⁹ John 3:34

¹⁰ Hebrews 2:14-15

'But don't all religions lead to God?'

Navigating the Multi-Faith Maze

Review article by David W. Torrance on Michael Green's book

But don't all religions lead to God? by Michael Green is published by IVP, 2002. £5.99 ISBN 0-85111-281-1

This is a superb book, Biblical, clearly written and much needed in today's debate on this subject. It challenges the commonly held view that 'all religions are ultimately the same, and lead to the same God'. This view held by many of our policy makers, in this country and in Europe, is that belief which lies behind the frequent and deliberate attempt to remove specifically Christian teaching and prayers from schools, universities, colleges, hospitals and prisons. Those holding this view believe that Christianity is only one religion among many and ultimately all are the same, holding the same values leading to the same God!

Michael Green skillfully navigates through the present multi-faith maze. With the Bible, he insists that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is altogether different from every other god in the world.

This affirmation does not deny that there is much good in other religions nor that as Christians we have much to learn from them; neither does it deny many share some of the values and ethical standards of Scripture! It does not deny either that there is great need for good people of whatever religion to work together for the welfare and peace of the world! We must love people of other religions and treat

them with respect. Nonetheless, the Bible is uncompromising in declaring the utter uniqueness of Christ and that in him alone is there salvation!

World religions

Many of the religions of the world do not believe in God! It is therefore sheer ignorance which says that all religions lead to God! World religions fall into one or more of seven groups.

- There are *occult religions*, such as animism, witchcraft, magic and some elements of the New Age. These are concerned with spirits, often evil spirits which need to be placated. So we have the African witch doctor, the Mongolian shaman and the local sorcerer. Occult religions are about spirits – often evil spirits – not about God.
- There are *imperial religions*. They are not about God either. They generally take the form of worshipping a king, or emperor or great political leader, for example, the so-called divine kings of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the Caesars of Rome, the Shinto emperors of Japan, together with Hitler, Mao, Stalin and others.
- There are *ascetic religions*, such as Jainism, Buddhism and some strands of Hinduism. They are really 'do-it-yourself religions'. They are not about God but about self-renunciation. Buddhism is certainly not about God.
- There are *genital religions* or fertility cults. They worship sex. This type of religion ranges from the fertility cults

of the old Canaanites, through lascivious Hindu temples, through places like London's Soho and Amsterdam to today's XXX films and videos and the astronomical sales of pornography.

- There are *bourgeois religions*, which feed the religious instincts of the leisured classes and cost their adherents nothing apart from massive financial contributions. They are bodies like Christian Science, Spiritualism, Scientology, Theosophy and many of the so-called self-improvement cults which have mushroomed in our day. They are all about human-beings ('man' in its generic sense), not God.
- There are *prophetic religions*, which arise from the dynamic leadership and moral challenge of a great leader. These tend to sweep across the world, often within a century of their origin. Such was Islam and is Marxism to this day.
- Finally, there are the *revelatory religions*, which claim that all that is taught and practised has been revealed. Among this group is Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

From this it is clear that all religions do not lead to God and that such a statement, however widely believed, is made naively and out of ignorance.

The Person of God

Of the revelatory religions only Judaism and Christianity teach that God can be personally known by the believer. They teach that God has

given a reliable and personal disclosure of himself to humankind. Judaism tells of God's revelation of himself through his mighty deeds of deliverance for his people and through the words of the prophets. Christianity teaches that God has fully revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ.

In Islam, Allah (God) himself is personal. Islam teaches that there are no subordinated deities and statues and has an absolute prohibition of idols which in any way represent God. In Islam, however, God cannot be *known* in himself as a person. 'Allah reveals his message. He never reveals himself.' The worshipper prays to him but cannot be said in any way to know Allah or have intimacy with him. For Islam such a claim is deemed to be blasphemous. A person can be killed for making it. All that we can know (according to Islamic teaching) is the will of God as given in his laws and decrees.

Judaism and Christianity alone emphasise the actual person of God, who is holy, loving, forgiving and saving.

The uniqueness of Christ

The book does not set out to argue that Christianity is better than other faiths, or that Christianity in itself is special. For Christians are, and have been, as fallible as anyone else. What the book does argue is that Jesus and his disclosure of God are special, or unique.

Why Jesus is special

First, the *influence* of Jesus was special. No one in all history has had such an influence as Jesus of Nazareth. Today more than a third of the world's population professes to follow him, and no faith has ever had so many worshippers. Their numbers are rapidly increasing throughout the world.

Mohammed has had a profound influence, but his lifestyle is scarcely comparable to that of Jesus. Mohammed's religion was militaristic from the earliest days at Medina. Although moderate Islamic countries

may be peace-loving, Islam has often been, and in many parts of the world remains, the religion of force as is all too apparent.

Second, the *teaching* of Jesus was special. Nobody ever taught like him. Such was the conclusion of the soldiers sent to arrest him by priests who were jealous of his influence. Such is the conclusion of countless numbers through the centuries who have experienced his power through his teaching.

Third, the *character* of Jesus was special. Never has there been a character like his, so humble and yet so strong, so prayerful and yet so down to earth, so peaceful and yet so energetic, so loving without sentimentality, so dynamic without being hearty. Nobody has been able to hold a candle to that matchless life. And nobody has been able to trash it either. In all the world he has had no equal, argues Green.

Jesus' disclosure of God is special

Jesus Christ claimed to share the nature of God Almighty while being at the same time a loving and humble member of the human race. This is utterly without parallel in any of the faiths of the world. It makes Jesus very special indeed.

By embodying both the greatness of God and his passionate and personal care for us, Jesus, alone of the great teachers, claimed to bring God to us. He made good his claims by his incarnation, his life, his teaching, his miracles, his fulfilment of prophecy, his demonstration of power in human lives so that hundreds of millions of people for two thousand years have come to believe in him and stake their all in that faith.

Green points out that if we ask, 'Who or what is God like?' the Bible is perfectly clear, 'He is like Jesus'. As Paul says in Colossians 2:9, 'In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.' The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (3:1). Jesus although a man, is at the same time

God. As Jesus said to Philip, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). We look at Jesus and we see him filled with love and compassion, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the fearful, forgiving and restoring the sinner, dying on a cross and rising to give life to the world. That is God. It is what God is like. Other religions speak of mankind's search for God. No other religion attempts to reveal God coming in search of us humans or reveals what God is like. Only Jesus does that.

Jesus' conquest of sin in the human heart is special

No other great teacher or religion dealt radically with human wickedness. Most other religions tend to treat sin and suffering lightly. Some, like Confucianism, are inclined to brush it aside. All throw humankind back on itself as if men and women can overcome evil in their own supposed strength. They tell people what to do. They provide rules and offer what is believed to be a practical guide to life. Islam is more realistic about sin. Nonetheless, in Islam sin is regarded not as breaking God's heart but as rebellion against his will. Men and women are commanded to submit to God's will. With that intent Islam offers a legalistic system embracing its creed, prayers, almsgiving, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca. These are deemed necessary but offer no guarantee of heaven.

In Christ God himself deals with sin

In Christ God makes atonement, forgives, rescues, delivers men and women and restores them to fellowship with himself.

The Hindu doctrine of *karma* says (and almost all other religions are similar), 'You sin, you pay'. The cross of Christ shows God saying, 'You sin, I pay.' That is utterly unique!

Only Jesus broke the barrier of death

No other religion handles the reality of death satisfactorily. Both Hinduism

and Buddhism believe that there is an after-life. But it is nothing to look forward to. Although different, both believe in incarnation and re-incarnation without any clear goal. Islam is more positive. It is clear that there is life after death. The Islamic perception of paradise, however, is very sensual and macho. There is not much for women. No matter how faithful a Muslim you are you cannot be confident of paradise. 'Feeling safe from the wrath of Allah' is one of the seventeen major sins in Islam, but it is tempered with another major sin, 'despairing of Allah's mercy'. It is the fear of hell even for the devout Muslim which has led in some Islamic circles to the pronouncement that only those who die in *jihad* can be certain of heaven.

The Christian message is altogether different. Jesus offers eternal life as a gift to those who love and trust him and the assurance of heaven. In that Jesus is altogether unique.

The resurrection of Jesus is unique

The bones of other religious leaders lie scattered in the dust. Jesus vindicated his claim to offer eternal life by himself rising from death to a new and radiant life after three days.

History testifies to Jesus' death. The evidence for his resurrection is overwhelming. Not least of the evidences is the life and continuance of the Church (as well as the empty tomb and the eye-witnesses of the risen Lord). Following the first Easter the disciples were completely transformed and ever since men and women have been prepared to die for the conviction that Jesus is risen.

Jesus alone promises to live both 'with' and 'within' his followers

None of all the great religious leaders promise spiritual union with their god! The promise that the Lord would never leave his followers and never, never forsake them, runs right through Scripture. Jesus marvellously fulfilled that promise. 'Surely I am with you always', he said.

More than that, he promised actually to live 'within' them, cleansing, forgiving, renewing them day by day, calling them into continued fellowship with himself, filling them with love and power. Nothing can express more adequately the intimacy of friendship and fellowship with himself into which God calls us. No wonder Paul says exultingly, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col.1:27). The very presence of God in Jesus living both *with* and *within* his followers marks them off and sets them apart from the rest of the world.

Jesus then is special and compared to all other leaders is unique. He alone brought God into our arena. He alone dealt with human wickedness. He alone broke the barrier of death. He alone of all religious leaders offers to come and live both with and within the hearts and lives of believers, so that he provides not only an example to follow but also (and most importantly) the power to do so, as he lives out something of his own life through us.

Facing some hard questions

The writer deals practically with various hard questions, which are frequently asked.

• *Is there any sense in which all religions have a common core?*

Yes! Almost all religions believe in basic morality. All religions attempt to lift people's eyes from their own selfish concerns to some higher ideal. But that is about all. In every other respect they are extraordinarily divergent.

• *How should Christians behave towards those of other faiths?*

Jesus taught us both to love everyone and to show the same quality of love towards others as God demonstrates in his love to us, no matter what their religion.

• *How should Christians regard other religions?*

As Christians we should be ready and prepared to learn from people of other religions, knowing that all good, wherever it is found, comes ultimately from God. Other religions contain elements of truth that must come from God and yet there are also elements

that are definitely false and probably come from the 'father of lies'. In affirming this, Christians at the same time affirm that full light has dawned in Christ alone and that salvation is in Christ alone, who died for those 'who were far off' as well as those 'who were near'.

• *What is the situation of people who do not respond to the Gospel?*

Nobody deserves God's acceptance, but God in his great mercy has made provision for those who trust him to be accepted through his sheer undeserved generosity. Those who do not respond to the gospel miss this glorious relationship with God. Tragically they miss it forever.

• *What about those who have never heard the Gospel?*

How will they fare? We are in no position to judge. We leave that to God, but we are told to do something about it and to take the Gospel to them.

• *Should Christians then try to convert members of other faiths?*

The answer is clearly yes. *First*, Jesus commanded it. *Secondly*, it is the natural thing to do for all who have discovered Jesus Christ to be rich treasure. *Thirdly*, Christianity is essentially a missionary faith. It is only through hearing from others who believe that any of us come to faith in Jesus?

Christians rightly feel under an obligation to share the Gospel. At all times however Christians must behave with great courtesy, respect and love to people of other religions.

Michael Green's closing chapter is an appeal for all of us to take Christ seriously and to accept his offer of salvation.

This book is for ministers and lay people. A charity enabled a copy of this book to be sent to every Member of Parliament and to every member of the House of Lords. Would that also every MSP receive a copy, read it, accept its conclusions and act on it! I warmly recommend it and encourage those who have bought it and read it to try and make it widely known.

The Damascus or Emmaus Road?

Gordon Palmer, Edinburgh

In a recent issue of their magazine *Idea* an article on the history of the Evangelical Alliance contrasted some 'then and nows'. Then, '1954: the Alliance sponsors Billy Graham's Harringay crusade, which is seen as a turning point in modern British evangelicalism.' Now 2002: 'The Alliance initiates *face-values* which is seen as a turning point in post-modern mission – less the idea of inviting people to a Christian rally, and more about Christians being mobilized to bring the message in Word and deed to the wider community using a variety of media'.¹ This is one example of a different approach in evangelism and mission, a difference in large measure coming from a different understanding of conversion. What we might call the 'process model' as opposed to 'crisis model' of conversion, coupled with language about journeying, is much more in vogue.

Crusades & rallies - OUT?

In the March 2003 issue of *Christianity and Renewal* Steve Chalke 'argues that it is more winsome and biblical to see ourselves, not as "in" or "out" but as on the road with God.'² John Finney has a chapter called 'The New Evangelism' in his book *Recovering The Past*.³ This 'New Evangelism,' he says,

'seems to have evolved spontaneously in many different denominations and without any central planning. It is a sea-change which has altered both the practice and the attitudes of the churches in the space of barely five years.... There are three main areas of change. None of them wholly new but the alteration in emphasis is remarkable.'⁴ The first of his three is 'from the Damascus road to the road to Emmaus', a shift, he claims, from being dominated by a crisis model of conversion, to a more gradual, less confrontational approach. To quote a Scottish source, in a circulated paper by Forward Together, Peter Neilson, formerly employed by the Church of Scotland in an evangelism leading and training role, wrote, 'The received wisdom has associated evangelism with a crisis... the element of crisis was central. That led to the desire to precipitate that crisis in a context that encouraged a direct confrontation with the person and claims of Christ, usually through a person associated with the gift of persuasion, who became the stereotype of the evangelist.... All this has gone out of fashion for many reasons and partly because of Alpha.... Process evangelism has taken over from crisis evangelism.'⁵

Crusades, rallies, guest services are out. Exploring with people as they make their journey is in. But are they alternatives? Are there lessons to learn from the change in emphasis? Are there dangers in losing some of the positives of the former approach?

Challenges to the Traditional Crisis Model

A number of serious challenges to the crisis model have been made.

Too narrow, not sufficiently life transforming

A trenchant criticism of the crisis model, without being a complete rejection of it, was found in Jim Wallis' book, *The Call To Conversion* first published in 1981. 'Like many evangelical children, I was 'saved' at a young age' he tells us.⁶ However he found that that conversion had little to do with discipleship. It was an essentially private and abstract experience. He later left the church to become involved in what he considered the real issues of his time – challenging racism, supporting the peace movement and so on. Yet he slowly reconsidered these issues in the light of the teaching of Jesus and came to regard himself as going through a subsequent conversion, towards the

world, towards serving God's purposes in the world. 'Conversion always means two things: seeing Jesus and seeing our neighbour.'⁷ Conversion then, for Wallis, was more than his childhood 'born again' experience. A whole life transformation was in view, one that took time.

It doesn't work that way!

In describing the change from 'the Damascus road to the road to Emmaus', John Finney says, 'The shift to a more gradual model of coming to faith has taken place for several reasons.' He gives only two. 'First and foremost, Christians have begun to evaluate and learn from past experience. British research in the early 1990s suggested that church-centred, event-oriented methods were largely ineffective.... Second, detailed research has now been done in England on the way in which adults come to faith. This has shown that 69% come gradually to faith rather than through a sudden conversion.'⁸ These two reasons sound suspiciously like one reason to me – nevertheless a true and important reason. A long hard look has been taken at how people have come to faith, particularly by Finney himself in his very illuminating work *Finding Faith Today*. He found that *relationships*, not *events*, were key and a gradual conversion was more than twice as common as a crisis experience.

Another look at Biblical examples

'The controlling biblical paradigm of conversion has been the story of the conversion of St Paul on his way to Damascus. The story occurs three times in the book of Acts and has been turned to often as an example of what conversion to the Christian faith should be like – a sudden, overwhelming, experience of God.'

But it is hardly the only example. In *Faith In A Changing Culture*, John Drane looks at Peter. He identifies 'six stages in the discipleship of Peter, each one leading on naturally from the other.'¹⁰ It is very difficult to say at which of these stages Peter was

converted. Drane maintains it is the turmoil, the gradual learning, the mistakes and blind alleys, the progress made through, with and despite these, that many find more relevant to the challenge to learn, struggle, serve and grow in today's world.

Insights from other disciplines

As well as looking at the Biblical material on the life of Peter, Drane points out how this more gradual, developing approach to conversion fits with insights from other fields, especially developmental psychology. Building on the work of psychologists like Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg, James Fowler has pioneered work outlining stages of faith. Others have built on Fowler's work, reshaping it somewhat. Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich in their book *The Critical Journey* outline six stages which, Drane points out, fit well with his case study of Peter. Hagberg and Guelich also show that the idea that the life of faith passes through various stages is nothing new. They trace it back to the early Christian centuries, giving a wide number of examples.¹¹

It doesn't fit well with today's attitudes

Today's spiritual searchers, we are told, are attracted to personal formation, to growth and transformation, to open ended community. They are not easily impressed by a sin/guilt and forgiveness model: in fact they can barely comprehend it, it does not enter their frame of reference. That is Chalke's main point in the follow up article in April's *Christianity and Renewal*.¹² The Church and the message it shares 'needs to be open, flexible, reflective, experimental, dynamic and energetic'. The journey model suits these, while the crisis model leads to a faith practice that is 'conservative, exclusive, orthodox, static, careful and scrupulous.'¹³

These, then, are five principal challenges to the traditional crisis model of conversion. So, the argument goes, we need to find a better model. The process approach,

the recovery of the old theme of 'the journey' is widely suggested as just what is needed. It is an added attraction for some that 'the idea that faith is a journey rather than a single ecstatic episode in a person's life goes right back into the Old Testament, where the journey motif is all-pervasive, and being nurtured as part of the community of faith is central to personal faith-commitment.'¹⁴ It also helps commend the journey motif to evangelicals to say that what is being proposed is not an overthrow of our true Biblical basis but of the modernist, Enlightenment model, which is not necessarily Biblical truth.

Is it Really New?

Two different and alternative models?

John Drane under the heading 'Redefining The Faith' sets out a series of contrasts between 'The Inherited Model' and the 'Holistic Biblical Model'.¹⁵ The contrasts are grouped into categories, one of which is 'Conversion'. For the inherited model he has conversion as 'event, destination, crisis, impersonal'. For the holistic biblical model the contrasts are 'process, journey, growth, personal'. Yet this is surely too polemical and simple a treatment. Drane himself in the book, when reflecting on Peter's six stages, says 'crisis points played a key role in Peter's experience'.¹⁶ They were part of the growth. Furthermore these crisis moments, such as Jesus' call 'Follow me', were hardly impersonal. Also, to juxtapose journey and destination is not so clear cut either. Is the journey undertaken with any intention of there being a destination? If not, is it a journey or simply keeping on the move? Is the point and value of the journey measured with reference to a destination, or in the fact that there has been travel: of whatever kind and direction?

Too much can be, and I think has been, made of the differences in 'the new evangelism'. Crisis and process

are not two separate alternatives, but integral parts of the whole.

Three points here:

Crisis and process need each other

This is best illustrated by pointing out that most often both are present. Go back to the supposed classic Biblical example of the crisis encounter, Saul meeting the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road. In Paul's retelling of this story in Acts 26, Jesus says to him, 'It is hard for you to kick against the goads (v.14)'. Clearly some struggle was already going on. His crisis encounter does not stand alone, unconnected to anything else that had gone before. He was already on a journey, and not just one that was taking him to the city of Damascus.

Conversion not simply an open-ended search

At some point or stage in the process there is a change, and that change is recognized and admitted. 'If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom.10:9). Belief can come gradually in a two steps forward, one back. It might even come almost imperceptibly. But the confession of faith, the 'Yes, I am a Christian' or, 'Jesus has always been Lord of my life', is said at some point for the first time. Someone might be speaking of a change that happened some time before and they are only noticing now or admitting to knowing; however the public confession is not in itself a process but is made in what is a fairly critical moment in the sense that here is the open acknowledgement, here is the confession that Romans 10:9 speaks of.

The process imagery contains critical moments

Steve Croft in *Growing New Christians* says: 'The Bible uses a number of different pictures to describe this process of coming to faith. The most common are birth and child rearing, agriculture, gardening, building and the journey. None of these events is instant. Each has a number of stages. Birth is preceded by pregnancy and

followed by infancy, childhood, adolescence and then maturity. There is no harvest unless there has been ploughing, sowing, weeding, and growing.'¹⁷ Yes, but there is still the critical moment of birth. There is still the key arrival of the first fruits and so on. Each of the processes have key, critical moments. Try telling any new parents that the birth of their child was simply one more day in the process.

Therefore it is best not to place the Damascus versus Emmaus roads as two exclusive alternatives. Peter Neilson in speaking of the use of the crisis model says: 'All this has gone out of fashion, for many reasons and partly because of Alpha.'¹⁸ But Alpha, while bringing in a different method of doing things, is hardly an example of moving from crisis to process – the session on becoming a Christian is the third of fourteen. Even Neilson's preferred course, Emmaus, which is part-written by both Steve Croft and John Finney, has the session on becoming a Christian as the sixth of fifteen. Both 'process' courses introduce the 'crisis' decision material rather early.

We will handle our approach to evangelism and discipleship best not by opting for one model rather than the other, but by recognizing that they need each other. That said, and while it would be unfair to say the crisis model was all that earlier evangelicalism knew, there has been a welcome shift in emphasis which has brought clear benefits and it is to these we turn.

How the 'Journey' Theme Helps

Shift in emphasis to the whole life

The shift is from the (almost) exclusively religious to the whole of life as the context for conversion.

A telling criticism of the crisis model is that it had too narrow a context and horizon. Therefore it did not help people deal with life

issues, did not equip them to be followers of Christ in their daily lives, and certainly did not help the church be an agency for the Kingdom of God. William Abraham in *The Logic of Evangelism* criticized the 'decision-ism' approach as ignoring Christ's main theme, the Kingdom of God. Conversion is but a part of initiation into the Kingdom of God: conversion, baptism, morality, the creed, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the classical spiritual disciplines all have their place in Christian initiation: 'If any of these elements is ignored or neglected, the church will have failed in its loyalty to the kingdom. Worse still, it will have stored up unnecessary trouble for itself and for those it has sought to bring into the glorious, eschatological rule of the living God.'¹⁹ The need then for a wider approach leads Abraham to state that the 'church needs to reinstate the institution of the catechumenate. We need a specific, official public institution that will ensure that the various dimensions on initiation we identified earlier are encountered by those who enter into the rule of God.'²⁰

An emphasis on conversion that is too heavily dominated by the crisis model results in an unbalanced Christianity. Among other things the focus is on personal religious experience rather than the Kingdom of God, is on churchy ground and so is ill equipped to deal with active engagement in the real world. In his recent book *A Churchless Faith*, Alan Jamieson has conducted serious research into those who have left evangelical-Pentecostal-charismatic churches in New Zealand. One group of leavers he calls 'reflective exiles'. 'The faith stance of the Reflective Exiles is seen not as a rejection of their previous faith but a realization of its inadequacy in the light of their wider experience. It is a pursuit of a more satisfying sense of "truth" that does not seek merely to wallpaper over the cracks of its own incompleteness, which the Reflective Exiles perceive is often being done in the faith claims prominent within the E-P-C churches.'²¹

'Journey' – more integrated approach to conversion and discipleship

This is slightly different from my first point which was essentially to say that conversion is wider than narrowly religious change; here the point is that conversion is a continuing change, transformation is lifelong and growth is a natural concomitant of these first steps. The imagery of new birth, with the subsequent stages of infancy, childhood etc., also makes that plain.

Surely part of the reason we have so much inertia among church members is that we never made it clear that we were expecting anything else. We simply wanted them to turn round, and did not present a vision of where we wanted to end up. There was a step for them to take, out of one thing and into another. The crisis model contributed to that, focusing too much on the past and present and not nearly enough on the future. We need to present the gospel not just as coming to Jesus so he can bless and help you, but as a presence and power that transforms all of life. It means we must have a much stronger emphasis on intentional discipleship.

Recovery of the vital role of the whole Church

Peter Neilson's paper is subtitled *Rediscovering the evangelising community*. Alpha, he claims, with its emphasis on the welcome, the meal, the discussion groups, has put evangelism 'in the hands of ordinary people in ordinary places'²² as opposed to being reserved for the special events that have been more the context of the crisis model. As well as suffering from being of church culture and putting people on the spot, the guest service/evangelistic rally tends to come across as a recruitment drive or as selling the gospel. It takes the responsibility off the church to be the living embodiment of the reality of the gospel. The key issue is how the outreach meeting goes, not how the church lives.

A recent book which pursues this in a very challenging and helpful way is *The Provocative Church* by Graham Tomlin. 'One of the key themes of this book is that unless there is something about church, or Christians, or Christian faith that intrigues, provokes or entices, then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears.... Unless someone wants to hear, there's no point in shouting louder. Churches need to become provocative, arresting places which make the searcher, the casual visitor, want to come back for more... a community of people that lives by God's ways, that has learnt to place love, humility, compassion, forgiveness and honesty right at the centre will make people think. To put it differently, a church that lives its life under the kingdom of God cannot help but provoke questions. And when it does that, then is the time for evangelism. That is the time for the simple explanation of the good news of Jesus Christ.'²³

Along with the increase in use of the journey motif, and of the Kingdom of God as the basis for church life and mission, another regular debate in recent years has been whether belonging comes before or after believing. The crisis model was that someone would be confronted with the claims of Christ and when they had responded would then look for a church to belong to. But another of the findings of Finney's research is that most people find Christ within the orbit of the church. 'Evangelism is about helping people to belong so that they can believe.'²⁴

The Church needs to take risks

This shift in emphasis to 'Journey' is suited to a time when the Church needs to take risks. It may sound as though the 'crisis' model is the one that is all about risk. But, for the Church, it was actually rather safe. We met people on home turf, with questions from *our* agenda. The whole approach of a largely unmapped journey, the accepting of fellow travellers who are exploring rather

than affirming certainties, the variety of pace, issues that come up on the way – in fact, the notion of our moving, leaving our strongholds, introduces all sorts of difficult and risky issues.

For example, who can belong and on what basis? Churches committed to using predominantly the crisis model tend to draw fairly firm boundaries. It is clear who is in and who is out. The 'holy middle' is well protected from the dangerous stuff outside. This is the *bounded set model*. Three other approaches are the *fuzzy set* where there is more room for ambivalence, where doctrinal and ethical issues are fudged rather than being resolved; the *open set* where there are effectively no boundaries except those which are self-imposed, and belief and lifestyle are not matters of community concern; and the *centred set*, a dynamic rather than static model, where the direction in which a person is facing is more important than their distance from the centre.

This latter set relates well to the journey imagery and process model. Those who are searching for faith and those who are growing in faith can walk together towards the centre without worrying unduly about boundary lines. 'The journey has a destination – there is a centre to the community – and the process may involve periods of crisis, but there is freedom for people to walk or run, choose alternative paths and consider various routes.'²⁵ This has many difficult issues, for example, who can receive the Lords Supper (and can it be seen as a 'converting ordinance')? Who makes decisions about how the church spends her money – members only? What do I have to do to be a member? When do I do it?

More creative approaches to Church-culture interface

In today's world, themes such as searching, journey, recovery of roots, spirituality, telling the story and accompanied seeking all have a greater resonance with the everyday world. 'In a post-modern and post Christendom context churches which

operate as *centred sets* may be contextually most appropriate. This may not be immediately obvious. In a changing culture *bounded sets* with their comfortable certainties appear to offer a refuge, as the rapid growth of ideological, political and religious fundamentalism demonstrates.... Churches operating as *fuzzy sets* and *open sets* fit well within a culture which resists notions of commitment, but can such churches really be missionary congregations? *Centred set* churches, churches which invite people to join them on a journey, rather than inviting them to join a club with strict rules of membership, may foster a liberating rather than restrictive ethos and be more effective in mission. They may also be acting in ways that are authentically biblical, recovering the New Testament designation of Christians as "people of the Way".¹²⁶

Walking alongside others rather than confronting them with challenges and propositions will be a more effective way to build relationships and community. And the Church needs to learn very quickly how to do this. Still the vast majority of those who come to faith and follow Christ come from a Christian background, but those for whom that background exists is a steadily diminishing group. We need to learn to make new connections, new contacts, and find ways of opening up conversations, sharing stories, joining in serving together and so on. Communities that are open and outward looking will better fit today's needs.

For those interested in hearing stories but have no biblical background an approach that is less 'make your mind up now', and more exploratory, allowing space for the expression of doubt, the asking of questions and for dialogue, is more likely to work.

An agenda that is less churchy in scope will be needed to resonate with those who have little church background. Again this can mean putting more onus onto the Christian community, for the telling of their own stories of faith will be more relevant than trained theological talks. It will

not be key speakers or clever programmes that connect, but the way ordinary Christians journey.

The more open, exploratory approach will also provide an openness for those who are part of the interest in spirituality without first having doctrinal commitments or convictions. This is not to say that doctrine does not matter, but is to question whether it should generally have chronological priority.

And in discipleship the more open and in the long-term more thoroughgoing approach will be needed. In Christendom the church didn't have to worry too much about discipleship issues and personal transformation as people were socialised in Christian values and behaviour from childhood, by the family and society. That is no longer the case.

Hardly an Unmixed Blessing

While perhaps too much has been made by some of the differences between the crisis and process models, the latter has added much of value to our understanding mission in today's world. Yet it is not without dangers:

- process as an opt in or opt out journey can be a capitulation to the contemporary fluid approach to so many things. For example the contemporary approach to marriage sees it as a string of serial monogamous relationships. For many, alas, the notion of permanence has gone. A person can move in and out of relationships, even marriage, depending on what one's needs are, and the stage of the 'journey'. We certainly wish to avoid that with reference to marriage, but also we must beware of allowing people to take that approach with faith: start off with Jesus, try Mohammed, then some Dalai Lama - see how the journey goes...!
- the journey motif can also be a surrendering to the 'as long as I am happy I'll come along' approach of today's post-moderns - as long as I don't have to stick with it regardless, I'll come along and have a look.

- we can easily give in to the spirit of relativism: what I see and feel on my journey need not be the same as you, even if we are travelling together, and our different responses are equally valid.

- it's fine that we are on a journey - who cares if we are getting anywhere?

There will be other dangers and drawbacks. Many of them can be helped by remembering that *process needs crisis*. The journey has a destination as well as being an exploration. Just as someone might journey in America, travelling around and having a look, so someone else might go there - for a particular reason. We might allow both elements in the Church, but we must be clear we need *both*. The positive and, indeed, inescapable aspects of the crisis model can help us deal with much of the above, and therefore more fruitfully enjoy the benefits that the process model brings.

¹ *Idea*, Jan/Feb 2003 p.15

² *Christianity and Renewal*, March 2003 p.46

³ *Recovering The Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, John Finney. Dartman, Longman & Todd 1996.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.39

⁵ *Evangelism: from Crisis to Process?-rediscovering the Evangelizing Community*, Peter Neilson

⁶ *The Call to Conversion*, Jim Wallis. Lion 1981.

p. xiv

⁷ *Ibid.* p.110

⁸ *Op.cit.* p.40f.

⁹ *Op.cit.* p.40

¹⁰ *Faith in a Changing Culture*, John Drane. Marshall Pickering, 1993. pp.92-104

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp.218-223

¹² *Christianity and Renewal*, April 2003 p.48

¹³ *Threshold of the Future*, Mike Riddell. SPCK, 1998. p.12

¹⁴ Drane, *Op.cit.*, p.218

¹⁵ Drane, *Ibid.*, p.203.

¹⁶ Drane, *Ibid.*, p.105

¹⁷ Steven Croft, *Growing New Christians*, p.16

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¹⁸ *Op.cit.*

¹⁹ William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1989. p.163

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.174f.

²¹ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, SPCK, 2002. p.72

²² *Op.cit.*

²³ Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*, SPCK, 2002. p.10f.,14.

²⁴ *Op.cit.*, p.47; see also *RJCM*, Vol.7 No 2 'Believing & Belonging', Andy Bathgate.

²⁵ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting* (Paternoster) p.180

²⁶ *Op.cit.*, p.184

James Taylor reflects on Silence

A Neglected Opportunity

A German novelist writes of a man who worked in a broadcasting station and who kept mysterious objects in a biscuit tin. When questioned he reluctantly admitted that he hoarded 'certain kinds of left-overs'. When pressed further he identified these 'left-overs' as 'silences'. 'When I have to cut tapes, in the places where the speaker sometimes paused for a moment, or sighs, or takes a breath, or there is absolute silence, I don't throw it away, I collect it.... I splice it together and play the tape back when I'm at home in the evening. There's not much yet. I have only three minutes so far – but then people aren't silent very often'.

Continuity men (and women)

The same could be said if he had taken a tape recorder to many a contemporary church service. There are few, if any, silences. Many worship leaders, doubling as continuity men (or women) see to that. It would be a travesty of the truth to say that it was all noise, though sometimes it comes near it, but silence seems to be avoided at all costs. Words and music, particularly music, fill every nook and cranny of the service, leaving little or no room for meditation, personal response, prayer or independent thought. Gordon Bailey's experience is not unusual:

I sat in the church (I'd gone to break bread)
the pastor began to assure us

that we could spend time with
our minds fixed on God
– but somebody thought of a
chorus!

Communion services used to provide profitable periods of silence as the elements were distributed. Now, no more. Music is played, often that of a well-known hymn thus, effectively, stifling personal meditation or prayer. One church, visited several years ago, actually invited the choir to sing as the elements were being distributed. The horror of that was highlighted when the servers offered the bread and wine to the choir members as they were singing! Chaos replaced silence.

The devil advocates noise

C.S. Lewis in *Screwtape Letters* has the devil banishing silence from the world and substituting noise. The devil advocates 'Noise which also defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end'. If it has so far escaped us that noise, even as a means of obliterating, challenging and disturbing thoughts, is an instrument of the devil, then it is time we updated our manuals of spiritual warfare.

What, then, can we say of silence in general before we look at silence in a service of worship?

We need it because we live in a noise culture. Noise surrounds us like a suffocating cloud. The day may well start with the unwelcome noise of our alarm. The radio continues to serve as

a background to much that we do. During the day noise is incessant, unrelenting and intrusive whether it is the roar of traffic, the ringing of someone's mobile phone, the beat of someone's Walkman, the background music in the supermarket or the chatter of people. Our ears are assaulted even to the point of being abused. Several years ago I invited a young climbing companion to listen to the absolute silence on the top of one of our northern-most mountains. He was horrified and seemed under a compulsion to ruin it.

Communicating exhaustion of spirit

Our reaction to silence is invariably negative and, yet, we need it. Without it there can be no thought, even an awareness of ourselves. In silence we are forced to be alone with ourselves, to face who we are and to think of our place in the world. Kenneth Leech in *The Eye of the Storm*, writing of the need for prayer and silence, makes the interesting point that, 'The hyperactive person, whether community worker or pastor, who has not given time for inner stillness... will soon communicate to others nothing more than his or her inner tiredness and exhaustion of spirit – not a very kind thing to do to people who have enough problems of their own.'

Those responsible for planning church services forget the value of silence at their peril. Should a service of worship not be a refuge from the constant pounding our ears daily

receive? Do we really need the deluge of sound which continually descends on us from the zealous band which leads the singing part of worship? All too often you think enviously of the tribute paid to a man 'whose conversation was punctuated by spells of inspired silence'! Periods of silence, even when directed, can be frightening when strange or novel to a congregation but they also can be inspired! Silence has a long and honoured tradition in private devotion but we can be much more specific about its value in a worship service of God's people.

Escape from distractions

A period of silence can, for example, allow us to escape from the domination of distractions. The voice of the person up front, or their personality, with the best will in the world, can get in the way of worship. He or she will insist on going on so. If something, or somebody, in the service irritates and distracts, then a period of silence enables us to deal with our reaction in a positive way. If we have been ruffled by the over-energetic playing of the band then a moment's silence enables us to quieten and still our spirits. Even a deep feeling of irritation, not unknown even among devout worshippers, can be dealt with if we are allowed a moment to look at, and deal with, our own thoughts and reactions.

Silence is also an aid to communion or, more correctly, an expression of it. Archbishop Bloom, in his little book *Living Prayer*, points out how silence between two individuals is often an expression of a deep relationship. The need always to be talking is a sign of superficiality. In worship, 'Every expression, either verbal or in action, may help, but they are only expressions of what is essential, namely, a deep silence of communion.' He tells the story of the French saint of the 18th century, who asked an old peasant what he was doing sitting for hours in the church, apparently not even praying. The reply was, 'I look at him,

*Do we really need the
deluge of sound which
continually descends
on us from the
zealous band*

he looks at me and we are happy together.'

No matter how effectively the hymns or the pulpit prayers express the devotion of the worshippers, there is great value in allowing space for the expression of the worship of individual hearts and minds. Contemplation, for that was what the old peasant was practising, is a neglected or lost aspect of the average worship service. 'Silence' wrote the late Donald Coggan, 'is recollection, or, better, re-collection: the collecting together of a person's distraught self, his thoughts and his desires, his sins and lusts, his hopes and fears, his ambitions and disappointments, in the presence of him who said: "Come unto me and I will give you rest."'

Peace and reassurance

In an article in *Third Way* (April, 2001) the brothers Brian and Kevin Draper, writing of new and different ways of worship, make the point:

There are few places you can go to find silence and depth in a culture saturated with white noise. The church has a chance to offer people a safe and inspirational environment in which to find a space to encounter themselves and God. Hence, 'alternative' worship will often be contemplative and will allow for sustained periods of reflection.

It is embarrassing to ask, when talking to those responsible for the construction of a worship service, what place has been allowed for 'looking at God and allowing him to look at me' to be experienced and for contemplation to be a reality. In addition it could well be the case that the service, as led from the front, does not reflect what is in the minds of some in the congregation. A period of silence allows that to be rectified. Hymns may be joyful and prayers express thanksgiving, but what of the man whose mind is in turmoil over possible redundancy or the woman

It is embarrassing to ask... what place has been allowed for 'looking at God and allowing him to look at me'

who can think of little else than an imminent hospital appointment or the youngster struggling with some fierce temptation? A period of silence enables them to bring these matters before God and to find peace and reassurance before the service continues on its way.

Neglect of transcendence

'But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.' So Habakkuk (2:20) encourages the response of silence to the awe and greatness of God. Hymn writers have not been slow to respond similarly. Gerhard Tersteegen is one: .

Lo! God is here! let us adore,
And own how holy is this place!
Let all within us feel his power,
And silent bow before his face..

J.G. Whittier is another:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with
Thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

The Almatey, not the Almighty

We need to ask, 'What is the most appropriate response to the revelation of God's holiness, greatness?' Immediately we ask such a question we are faced with the uncomfortable fact that in too many congregations it is the nearness and intimacy of God which is paramount, not his *transcendence and holiness*. Hence the familiarity of approach and absence of silence. It would be an exaggeration to say that worship has degenerated into a constant 'matey' chatter but nevertheless the danger is there. One American writer has said:

A congregation that praises loudly without worshipping meekly has not experienced the awesome and terrible side of the Almighty. To celebrate his presence is one thing: to tremble before him, as the Psalmist exhorts, is another.

When the members of a congregation become aware of the nature of the God they have approached, the holy hush is just as powerful as the jubilant hallelujah. The prophet's 'Woe is me' is often more appropriate than Peter's 'It's sure good to be here.' A.W. Tozer perceptively asks in one of his books, 'Are we losing our "Oh!"?' He goes on to say:

...when the heart, on its knees, moves into the awesome Presence and hears with fear and wonder things not lawful to utter, then the mind falls flat, and words, previously its faithful servants, become weak and totally incapable of telling what the heart hears and sees. In that awful moment the worshipper can only cry 'Oh!'

Confronted by the almost constant mixture of music and words in the average worship service, Tozer's question and comment are profoundly challenging.

Of course a programmed period of silence can be artificial. What is more appropriate on the part of the worship leader is sensitivity to the response of the congregation to a disclosure of God's greatness and glory. Instead of rushing on, and even expressing the worshippers' response in his own words, he may introduce a period of silence. Such silence can be powerful. Some other values of silence in worship merit mention.

Emptiness within

A period of silence enables the worshippers to look at themselves. Richard Foster quotes an ancient Syrian monk, 'Those who delight in a multitude of words, even though they say admirable things, are empty

within.' Foster believes we come to value words more in times of silence: 'This is because we are no longer cheapening words by overuse.' Certainly words can come too readily to us and sadly hide an inner vacuum or bankruptcy. Perhaps, after God's word has been proclaimed in a service, the preacher should forget about altar calls and the 'I want you to get up out of your seats' approach and simply suggest that meditation, rather than action, is called for. Too soon the innocent chatter among a departing congregation will crowd out all deep thought or the challenge of preparing lunch will dominate. A period of silence, even introduced by a series of questions, will enable those who have heard God's word to respond personally and appropriately. In the light of what we have heard we have an opportunity to look at our own doubts, fears, hesitations, questions, even our emptiness before we cover it up with conversation and chat.

The trouble is that our fear of silence manifests itself in different ways. For the worship leader it can be nerve-racking. The inner pressure is to abbreviate it, principally because we are almost conditioned to fill every empty second. It seems unnatural. For the worshipper it seems foreign. It is not a language with which he or she is familiar. The temptation is to let the mind wander. Nature, and human beings, detest a vacuum. You never know what will rush into it! We haven't been trained in silence far less in meditation. Silence, all too often therefore, produces embarrassment rather than expectancy. Yet it ought not to be so. It could be, that in escaping for even a brief moment from the 'noises' of the worship service, the 'still small voice of God' will be heard with awesome clarity. 'There is power in silence,' says Donald Coggan, 'the very power of God.'

Epilogue

Is Christian Ministry Mission Impossible?

Reflecting on my final issue of this Journal, recalling ministers I have worked with over the past ten years and thinking of my years in pastoral ministry, I have been reminded of the demands and difficulties we face. Most of our members see only the tip of the iceberg. However, the nine-tenths of the ministry below the surface is nothing less than 'mission impossible'. Consider what faces each minister every Monday morning.

First is recovery from the emotional, physical and spiritual output of Sunday. Ministers must keep reasonably fit lest they become too tired to function effectively; not a few suffer serious stress symptoms. Second is their personal walk with God, nurtured through Bible reading and prayer; it is vital to keep in close touch with the Lord. Third is the discipline of sermon preparation to feed the hungry, comfort the disconsolate and encourage the downcast; 'much study is wearisome to the flesh', wrote Paul to a young minister!

Fourth is pastoral work in hospital and home: Marital problems, misunderstandings and quarrels among members are never far away. More, many ministries flounder because elders and leaders are neglected or taken for granted! Fifth is administration. How many vital pieces of paper land on the minister's desk bringing yet more work; administration is a Waterloo for many. Sixth are committees ever more greedy for precious time – congregational, presbytery, Assembly and community committees, many of which the minister has to chair.

Seventh, last but by no means least, is the minister's family. Children's rights to their parent's time are too often supplanted by needy parishioners. And what of the marriage partner and the marriage itself? Many of us must confess we have scored very low in this seventh area.

In short, are those in the pastoral ministry called to 'mission impossible'? Blessing, fruitfulness, good relationships with congregation and community, though earnestly longed and prayed for, are often elusive.

There is no easy formula. Certainly, iron discipline is needed. Augustine wrote: 'To myself a heart of stone; to my fellow-men a heart of love; to my God a heart of flame.' Even so, the fact is ministry still seems to be 'mission impossible' – that is, unless we experience an ongoing, secret miracle witnessed by too few: 'our sufficiency is of God'!

It is when minister (and marriage partner) are at the end of their resources that Christ most often silently steps in, supplying the need, restoring the flagging strength and rekindling the smoking wick. Then 'mission impossible' is accomplished through him who is the minister's real Shepherd. To his name therefore must be all the praise and honour, as it will be forever when we prostrate ourselves before him in eternal adoration.

David Searle

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The Homiletical Plot

Eugene L Lowry

Westminster John Knox Press,
Louisville, Kentucky, 2001.

138pp. £12.99

ISBN 1 664 22264 1

This is a reissue of the 1980 edition with a brief afterword (14pp.) now included. Lowry's main concern is with the boring, predictable sermon: 'I was taught to 'tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.' Nothing could be more fatal for a sermon!'

In his ideal Lowry has live stages which a sermon should move through:

- The preacher announces a difficulty or problem to engage attention.
- The difficulty is analysed.
- The third stage is a key moment for Lowry in which the preacher is able to show in a striking manner how the biblical text addresses this issue.
- After this has been done the Gospel is explained.
- This final stage anticipates how life can now be lived in the light of the Gospel.

Lowry's aim is that the tension in a sermon should not be resolved too soon; that we should be keeping people thinking through the issue for as long as possible so that the gospel can have greater effect.

Although it was a stimulating and sometimes provocative read I do have concerns. Firstly, Lowry's approach seems to have the built-in danger of putting man at the centre, rather than letting God's word set and shape the agenda.

Secondly, the danger is to assume that through adopting this technique we will therefore be more faithful preachers of the Bible. Techniques by themselves do not guarantee this and indeed the diligent preacher will often find more than enough surprises in scripture to shock both themselves and most congregations without resorting to particular techniques.

In conclusion, I am concerned at the way in which the text of Scripture itself is not given the authority and priority it deserves. Certainly there is no excuse for the boring sermon, but surely the remedy lies less in techniques than upon the prayerful and considered searching of the Scriptures in order to present God's word with passion to those who hear.

Angus MacLeay, Sevenoaks

Grace, Grit and Gumption

Geraint Fielder

Christian Focus, Tain, & The
Evangelical Movement of Wales,
240 pp. £6.99

ISBN 185792 500 9

The Revd John Pugh held an open-air service on the square in Tredegar, South Wales, on a Tuesday in August 1872. This Spirit-inspired event led to the formation of the Forward Movement of the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Calvinistic Methodists). The brothers Seth and Frank Joshua joined him, and the three men committed themselves to the work of evangelism. The Movement began in a borrowed tent, 'Yet in fifteen years it built forty-eight well-equipped centres seating 43,000 people, had 6,896 born-again members, 1,056 on probation, 10,763 Sunday school scholars and 22,000 'hearers'. Geraint Fielder gives names and faces to these statistics.

The early days of the evangelists and their work are covered in detail. The Scottish link with William Ross had a marked influence on the formation and the development of the Movement (especially Chapter Four). The development includes the period of the 1904-05 Revival in Wales. After dealing with Frank Joshua's ministry in Neath, the book closes with an account of Seth Joshua's arrival in that town to continue the work of his brother. There is a 'Postscript', two appendices, a bibliography, notes and an Index.

This thrilling story is well told. The author has captured the different characteristics of the three leaders. They were different, yet one in their boundless energy, capacity for

friendship and zeal for the gospel. It is a challenging book. It should rekindle our evangelistic spirit and help us to think of appropriate evangelistic methods.

The author could have been more critical, especially in assessing 'methods', and could have interacted with recent writers on the Forward Movement.

Noel Gibbard, Cardiff

Second Choice - embracing life as it is

Viv Thomas

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2000.
154pp. £12.99

ISBN 1 84227 010 9

Using the life of Daniel, although not adhering rigidly to the Book of Daniel verse by verse, this book provides a great number of insights into human nature as fallen nature.

The author uses Daniel and his friends in captivity and Daniel's decisions throughout his life, with all the accompanying temptations, as a measure of where those who are firmly in God can be in a world not of their own choosing. There is good use of everyday situations that highlight mankind's need of God and how we have to be aware of what the world in which we live is not that which we would choose, but we have to live with it just the same. A good book for those who think they are the only ones to be tempted by the world and struggle with the choices they have to make in a secular society while striving to live as a Christian.

The use of the phrase, 'second choice' is, of course, the basis of the book but I did find the constant use of the phrase, sometimes it seemed in every second sentence, an overkill of usage. However, that said, it is a worthwhile book for any leader to have on their shelf as a manual of insights into human nature at odds with the inward spirit of God. It would be a valuable read for the layperson seeking answers in a practical way as to why they feel as they do in this world of 'Me first', and, 'If it feels right do it'.

God's ways are not our ways or the ways of the world.

Well handled and well worth a read.

Dennis Rose, Kirkmahoe

The Gospel of Mark (IBT)

Donald H Juel

Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1999.
200pp. £12.99

ISBN 0 687 00849 2

'Can't see the wood from the trees.' The aim not only of this commentary but of this series of commentaries is to enable us to be able to make this distinction.

I was delightfully surprised when this commentary turned out to be not what I had expected. Here you will not read a verse-by-verse dissection of Mark's Gospel. Rather the commentary comprises 12 chapters in which Juel addresses what he considers to be the major themes of the Gospel. His lengthy Introduction brings to our attention something of the history of New Testament Interpretation. Here we meet with academic expressions such as Redaction Criticism. Against these Juel sets out his particular aim – Rhetorical Criticism. I wish I'd been able to read such a chapter when I began my formal theological study! To the working minister such an Introduction may do little more than evoke memories of the past.

In his overview of the Gospel, Juel's key emphasis is upon the distinction which can be drawn between a private reading and a public hearing of the gospel (Rhetorical Criticism). At the heart of his argument is the conviction that Mark's Gospel was composed for public reading and hearing. Such an approach to the gospel allows the public reader to use the tone of his voice to convey interpretation and understanding to the listener. Take for example, the Centurion's confession 'Surely this man was the Son of God' (15:39). Is this a believing or a cynical remark? According to Juel, the tone of voice will say it all.

Juel appears to lean heavily upon a modern English approach to interpretation. Words like *Post-Modernism* and *Deconstruction* did come

to mind as I read his commentary. Having said that, I have been sufficiently enthused by his commentary that I will further investigate the IBT series to help me see the Biblical wood from the trees.

Rob Craig, Londonderry

From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew

Robert B. Chisholm Jr.

Baker, Grand Rapids, 1998. 304pp.
£19.99

ISBN 0 8010 2171 5

While much of the opening chapter of Chisholm's book is taken up with encouraging preachers who have lapsed in their use of the Hebrew Bible to reverse that trend, he gives the game away when in the same chapter he informs us that the book has been 'designed to be a textbook for a second-year seminary Hebrew course'.

My overall impression is that the book is likely to succeed fairly well in that role, but is unlikely, in and of itself, to encourage 'lapsed' pastors to return readily to the use of the Hebrew Bible, particularly if they are seeking to do so in isolation from tutor support or from a peer group.

While I am as keen as any Old Testament tutor to encourage the use of the Hebrew Bible amongst students and pastors, in this age of prolific study aids I can scarcely agree with Chisholm's assertion that 'one cannot preach credibly and competently from the Old Testament without a working knowledge of Hebrew'. Chisholm's further claim that 'pulpit ministries will be revived' by return to the use of the Hebrew Bible in preparation for preaching is over simplistic.

Nevertheless, as a textbook, the book has much to recommend it, and I will certainly be placing it on a number of Module Indicative Reading Lists. In chapter 2, Chisholm gives us a brief annotated assessment of some of the best basic tools for Old Testament exegesis, including computer-based search programmes. Chapter 3 deals with the operating principles of Textual Criticism and provides us with

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a variety of significant examples. Chapter 4 focuses on issues of determining the meaning of words from usage and contains, *inter alia*, a valuable section on 'semantic sins' to be avoided. Chapter 5 gives us a very useful 60-page course on the 'Basics of Hebrew Syntax' which I certainly intend to use in some of the modules which I teach. In chapter 6 Chisholm explains the basic elements of the structure of Hebrew narrative and poetry. This is followed by a chapter on the literary analysis of both types of writing. In the closing chapters, in 'pulling it all together', Chisholm outlines and illustrates his exegetical method, and then seeks to 'make it contemporary'.

While this is not a book that can be perused lightly, it will prove to be a valuable textbook and reference tool for serious students of the Hebrew Bible, whether or not they are engaged in pastoral ministry.

Hector Morrison, Highland Theological College

The Letters of John – The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series

Colin G. Kruse

Apollos, Leicester, 2000. 255pp.
£14.99

ISBN 0 85111 776 7

For those who read and gained much from two previous publications of Colin G. Kruse, namely *Paul – the Law and Justification* and *New Testament Patterns of Ministry*, this study of John's Epistle will add to their esteem. The author blends his concern for both the truths of the New Testament to be clarified and the truths imparted thus to be effective in the life of believers.

The Pillar NT Commentary series is specially designed for 'serious pastors and teachers of the Bible'. With that in mind I used this volume amongst other worthies to preach a series in 1 John at our congregation's evening service.

Reading through the epistle prior to even a skim through the commentary, I jotted down all the points of interest and questions about the text and theology that occurred to me and the matters that I considered worthy of closer study.

What I discovered in Kruse's commentary from the start was a 3-D image of what I had read and reflected on in 2-D. Kruse depicts the scenario that gave rise to the epistle, as being a secession from the apostolic church in which John had some oversight. He admits that the reconstruction is only as good as the assumptions he has made. However, since he proceeds with the strict discipline of a scholarly mind on the basis of thorough and exhaustive research into the text and circumstances of John's ministry, together with imaginative insight into how these blend, we can confidently accept his proposed solution. He has enabled the reader to 'see' the significance of what John writes to those who possess all the facts and atmosphere of the situation. He gives a good sense of the text by setting the words in their context and by setting forth the nuances of the Greek text.

Do not be fooled into thinking that the footnotes are unnecessary details. Take, for example, note 199, page 174, where Kruse puts together the elements of the Christology of the secessionists and gives a comprehensive impression of their view. A careful reading pays great dividends in this commentary, for Kruse displays a fine grasp of Johannine thought and theology in relating the gospel and the epistles. Analysis of the difficult passages is generally of great help, as in the notes.

What I find curious is that whereas Kruse takes broadly the same view as John Stott in the Tyndale commentary series, he seems not to have consulted it (see bibliography). Despite similarities of view, read together they are a formidable team in the study of John's Epistles.

Will the commentary help you? Undoubtedly, for Kruse is a blend of the theologian who knows God, the

pastor who knows people, and the careful exegete who knows his subject, the Word of God.

Richard C Buckley, Glasgow

Romans. An Exposition of Chapter 12 - Christian Conduct

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2000.

528 pp. £19.95

ISBN 0 85151 794 3

Dr Lloyd-Jones is synonymous with thoughtful and detailed expositions of Scripture. The latest volume of his 'Roman' series, containing thirty-five sermons based on the text of the Authorised Version, is no exception. But it is not a dry or academic study. The burden of Dr Lloyd-Jones' message is that all the doctrine of Romans Chapters 1-11 must produce in us the 'Christian Conduct' which is the subtitle of this volume. In his own words (p. 5), 'Christianity is primarily a way of life and the object of the doctrine is to enable us to live that life.'

The term 'Radical Puritan' (p. 314) captures his approach well. Dr Lloyd-Jones, in company with the best of the Puritans, is able to take the word of God and bring it home to the heart unerringly. Chapter 7 on 'Legalism', Chapter 8 on 'Sanctification' and Chapter 26 on 'Slothfulness' are fine examples of this.

He is remarkably radical on the nature of the church. These sermons were preached between October 1965 and November 1966 in the context of a debate about the church, which also produced his famous address on 'Evangelical Unity' (cf *Knowing the Times*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Banner of Truth, 1989, pp. 246-257). The chapters on Romans 12: 3-8 anticipate and illuminate that notable message. You may not always agree, but Dr Lloyd-Jones will certainly stimulate your thinking! This is undoubtedly a book worth getting and reading.

As usual with Banner of Truth the production quality is very high. However there is no introduction or index, which some may find disappointing, though it might be an attempt to emphasise that this is

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primarily a series of sermons, not a textbook.

David Moore, Kilkenny

Let's Study Mark

Sinclair B. Ferguson

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1999.

304pp. £6.95

ISBN 0 85151 755 2

The material contained in *Let's Study Mark* first appeared as articles in the pages of the Christian Herald about 1985/1986 and was then collected, revised and published in 1989 by Kingsway under the title 'Understanding the Gospel'. In 1999, after what I think was a light revision and the addition of a study guide, this devotional commentary was published by the Banner as *Let's Study Mark*.

The fact that the book has a history makes little difference and it is still a very worth-while volume. The whole content of the Gospel of Mark is covered in seventy-five chapters, each of them short enough to be read comfortably in five or so minutes. The passages are, as would be expected, well-written and conservative, but with, it seems, a particularly evangelical slant. The Lord Jesus is kept at the centre of each chapter and the challenge to respond to him is a strong feature of the book. Though deliberately not technical, *Let's Study Mark* is insightful and ably opens up the message of Mark's Gospel. Each section of the study guide covers more than one of Dr. Ferguson's chapters, but feels additional to, rather than integral with, the work (perhaps because it doesn't run exactly parallel with the book).

The book is a good introduction to the gospel and its structure would allow it be used as a volume of daily readings for any one studying Mark. I also think it a particularly suitable volume to give someone who is interested in understanding the Christian gospel, but who may not have made a firm commitment to

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Christ'. This book could only help such a one. Its insightfulness and illustrative nature also proved a real aid to me in preparing a short series of talks on Mark chapter 6.

Having read and used *Let's Study Mark* (even in one of its previous incarnations) I can heartily recommend it.

David Milford, Holywood, NI

Read. Mark. Learn - John's Gospel
St Helen's Church, Bishopsgate,
London/Marshall Pickering, 1999.
271pp. £7.99
ISBN O 551 03204 9

Anyone who has been involved in leading group Bible Studies on a regular basis will always be on the lookout for good material. Here in this study of John's Gospel is such good material. It has its origins in St Helen's, Bishopsgate, where it has been used and developed over a large number of years. The Gospel has been split up into 30 studies with each study providing:

- the context, aim and structure of the passage
- the Old Testament background
- the meaning of each part of the passage, highlighting key issues
- practical applications
- suggested questions for leading the study

There is a very obvious desire to hear and understand John's Gospel in its own context. The references to the Old Testament background I found particularly helpful and enlightening. There is a commendable emphasis upon seeking to help people grasp the original meaning and intention of the text, before moving to application.

One or two things to note. The individual studies cover long passages. This is quite deliberate as often the same themes recur throughout the Gospel, but we found it meant that often we did not manage to cover a whole study and all its questions in an evening. Leaders may have to be

selective. They may also find the need to add other questions that apply the passage to the lives of those present, but then most material has to be adapted to suit a local situation. Some of the questions about the text were occasionally a little cryptic. Compared to much other Bible study material it does look for real engagement with the text from those using it. That is said not to put anyone off. In fact I believe it to be its greatest strength, and I would warmly commend the book, whether for group or personal study, or indeed for anyone thinking about preaching through John's Gospel.

David Scott, Dundee

Operation World (21st Century Edition) - when we pray God works.

Patrick Johnstone & Jason Mandryk
Paternoster, Carlisle, 2001. 789pp.
£19.99

ISBN 1 85078 357 8

The new edition of *Operation World* is a mine of information on the needs of every nation in the world. For any church with a missionary vision for the needs of the whole world it is a must. A brief summary of population, ethnic groups, languages, economy, political background and a detailed breakdown of religions is given for each country. Answers to prayers and challenges for prayer are then listed and much more. Ministering in an island community, as I do, the temptation is often not to see beyond the shores of our own island, and so I use this book every week at our evening service to introduce the needs of the world and hopefully to expand the missionary vision of my congregation. We look briefly at one country per week and then pray for it.

Obviously the book is also useful for individual Christians with a prayer burden for the world or for some specific nation. Naturally we cannot all go as missionaries, but at least we can be informed and we can pray. The book is easy to use, being well laid out and including a small map showing the position of each country (useful for those of us who are not geographically minded). A separate index is included

for different people groups as well as places. An accompanying CD-Rom is available for the more computer-minded. The mandate of the Lord for the church to go into all the world and make disciples still stands. *Operation World* is an essential tool for every Christian and every church as we look to obeying the command of our Lord.

William Black, Stornoway

Face to Face: Meditations on the Life Everlasting

G Thompson Brown
Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky,
2001. 123pp. £7.99
ISBN O 664 50163 X

This is a book for the bedside (be it in the nursing home, the hospice, or the family dwelling) designed to bring Christian hope to those struggling with age or terminal illness. It comprises 31 short chapters on themes related to what the believer in Christ may expect beyond physical death, a format which lends itself to one month's daily devotions – something which the author himself suggests. Each chapter contains a number of connected scriptural portions, some quotations from Christian authors mainly related to the theme outlined, and, in closing, the author's own thoughts. The book's accessibility keeps in mind the likely frailness of its intended readership: chapter 10 'Remember me', for example, speaks to those diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease while chapter 16 has those who have lost children as its focus.

The author writes from within the Reformed tradition, but he is not bound by it: his references – all helpfully listed at the end of the book – clearly display this. Should this put one off the book? Place yourself in the position of one facing death, no longer full of good health, youthful vigour and over-excessive zeal, and the fact that the book does not lie totally within the Reformed tradition becomes insignificant. Here are words that reassure dying believers, with God's Word taking first place.

There does seem to be a presumption that the reader is a

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Christian already. This does not rule out the book being an evangelistic tool – chapter 28 ‘The Throne’, for example, deals with judgement. God’s Word, read under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is its own evangelist, and we cannot say how this book may be used by God in circumstances where hope in Christ is absent. May those who do read this book die well.

Alastair J A Rosborough, Londonderry

Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition

Andrew Purves

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville/London, 2001. 125pp. £12.99

ISBN 0 664 22241 2

Andrew Purves believes that modern pastoral care has been ‘overly influenced by psychological theory and too often uninformed by historical practice’. He argues that we can learn a great deal from classical texts from the past which can provide a formative influence on our behaviour today, albeit with the recognition that they must be seen in their cultural and historical context which is quite different to our world of the twenty-first century. The theologians he has selected are Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Martin Bucer and Richard Baxter. Following his concluding comments the author offers a sample ordination and sermon in which he selects useful quotations from some of the above figures to supplement his biblical exegesis.

The author has written this book for men and women in pastoral ministry, together with seminary students and Doctor of Ministry candidates (pp 5, 7). In the author’s experience many of these people have completed training for pastoral ministry in the USA completely unaware of such historical figures, and in particular unaware of their classical texts on pastoral theology. By contrast, in the Scottish

context it should be surprising to find any ministerial students who are not familiar with these five prominent figures from church history. One can be considerably less certain of the accessibility of the selection of their writings, in fact Bucer’s *On the True Pastoral Care* has still to appear in an English translation.

This book was very enjoyable to read and profitable for reflection on my own pastoral practice. The author does point out some of his chosen figures’ weaknesses, in order to demonstrate the need for a critical mind in evaluating the contributions of figures from the past. Attention is drawn, for example, to Baxter’s defective doctrine of justification (pp. 102–104), and Gregory’s excessive ascetic practices that damaged his health (p.57).

This book is recommended to all who have or expect to have pastoral responsibilities in the Christian church in the future’.

Brian Talbot, Cumbernauld

Psalms - New International Biblical Commentary

Craig C. Broyles

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1999. 539pp. £11.99

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Craig Broyles admits that the task of writing a one-volume commentary on the Psalms was daunting, and certainly that constraint has influenced his approach to the book. His work is based on the conviction that the Psalms, ‘hammered out over generations of living with God’, have been written and revised to allow worshippers of any generation to encounter God. He states that the Psalms ‘are not private reflections of poets [but] models to guide the expressions of Yahweh’s worshippers in prayer and praise’. (p.3).

This commentary could be described as a thoughtful layman’s guide. Craig Broyles’ fresh approach does assume a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the reader. There is no significant discussion of Hebrew poetry, and the subject of date and authorship, by his definition, is not

considered crucial to interpretation. Whilst there is merit in viewing the Psalms as ‘models to guide’ and avoiding speculation over original events that produced the Psalm, to treat every superscription as secondary is going too far (e.g. Ps. 51 is placed in the exilic period when the superscription, which is, after all, part of Hebrew Scripture, clearly links it to David).

Cross-referencing between Psalms is helpful, as is his classification by genre. He prefers the term ‘Prayer Psalms’ to ‘Laments’. As regards the exegesis, each Psalm is interpreted as a whole and the commentary is taken in blocks of verses rather than phrase by phrase. Additional notes are sometimes included, often in regard to alternative readings to that found in the NIV. Using the analogy of a journey, this book could be seen as a useful, budget travel guide to a whole country. We are given an excellent overview, influenced by the writer’s own experiences. Sometimes he skips over areas with little more than general comments (e. g. three pages for Ps. 119). One of the most useful parts of the book is, unusually, the Table of Contents. Each Psalm is given a title to indicate the heart of the Psalm and help you encounter God, which is precisely the author’s intention.

If you want to explore particular areas in detail, you will probably need another guide. This one invites you to explore the Psalms, not the commentaries, for yourself

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